

Revolutionary Regroupment

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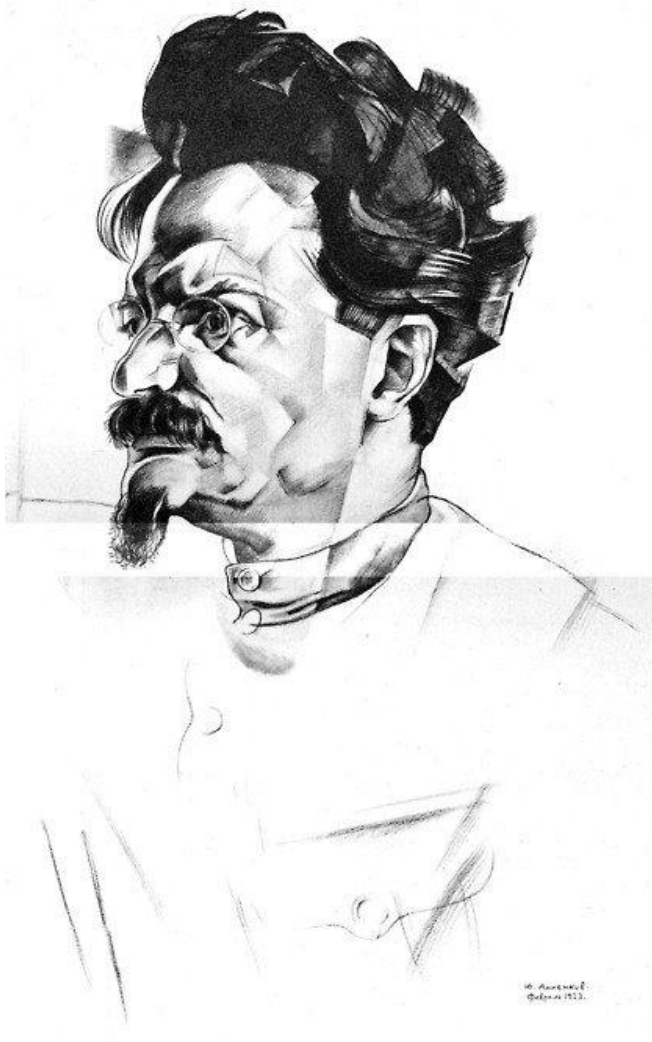
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Splinters in Politics and Art (excerpt)

Leon Trotsky (1938)

“In the June issue of your magazine I found a curious letter from an editor of a Chicago magazine, unknown to me. Expressing (by mistake, I hope) his sympathy for your publication, he writes: “I can see no hope however [?] from the Trotskyites or other anemic splinters which have no mass base.” These arrogant words tell more about the author than he perhaps wanted to say. They show above all that the laws of development of society have remained a seven times sealed book for him. Not a single progressive idea has begun with a “mass base,” otherwise it would not have been a progressive idea. It is only in its last stage that the idea finds its masses – if, of course, it answers the needs of progress. All great movements have begun as “splinters” of older movements. In the beginning, Christianity was only a “splinter” of Judaism; Protestantism a “splinter” of Catholicism, that is to say decayed Christianity. The group of Marx and Engels came into existence as a “splinter” of the Hegelian Left. The Communist International germinated during the war from the “splinters” of the Social Democratic International. If these pioneers found themselves able to create a mass base, it was precisely because they did not fear isolation. They knew beforehand that the quality of their ideas would be transformed into quantity. These “splinters” did not suffer from anemia; on the contrary, they carried within themselves the germs of the great historical movements of tomorrow.

“In very much the same way, to repeat, a progressive movement occurs in art. When an artistic tendency has exhausted its creative resources, creative “splinters” separate from it, which are able to look at the world with new eyes. The more daring the pioneers show in their ideas and actions, the more bitterly they oppose themselves to established authority which rests on a conservative “mass base,” the more conventional souls, skeptics, and snobs are inclined to see in the pioneers, impotent eccentrics or “anemic splinters,” But in the last analysis it is the conventional souls, skeptics and snobs who are wrong – and life passes them by...

.....

“Every new artistic or literary tendency (naturalism, symbolism, futurism, cubism, expressionism and so forth and so on) has begun with a “scandal,” breaking the old respected crockery, bruising many established authorities. This flowed not at all solely from publicity seeking (although there was no lack of this). No, these people – artists, as well as literary critics – had something to say. They had friends, they had enemies, they fought, and exactly through this they demonstrated their right to exist.”

Excerpted from “Art and Politics in our Epoch” *Fourth International*, March-April 1950. Full document can be read at the Marxist Internet Archive

Head in the Sand Rationalizations & Attempted Blackmail

The International Bolshevik Tendency “Explains” It’s Demise

Three decades since its first public statement [*FROM NEW YORK TO SRI LANKA: IT IS DESPERATELY NECESSARY TO FIGHT!* October 1982], the group that is today the International Bolshevik Tendency is visibly smaller than ever, more isolated than ever, and older than ever. It has also, like previous groups which had struggled to rebuild the revolutionary movement under difficult conditions of many decades without success, lost its revolutionary purpose and degenerated. More specifically, it has transformed itself into a qualitatively similar organization as the group it split from all those decades ago, the corrupt bureaucratized sect known as the Spartacist League.

Those who struggled against the Socialist Workers Party’s degeneration without success in the 1960’s analyzed some of the similar circumstances which today affect the IBT.

“The SWP in its leadership has become a very old party. From 1928 to the present--34 years--it has been led by the same continuous and little changing body of personnel. Thus it is the most long-lived, ostensibly revolutionary organization in history. Its current National Committee must have one of the highest average ages of any communist movement ever.”

“While the leadership is old, many of the leading rank and file party stalwart at the local branch level are middle-aged and comfortably well off--skilled workers with many years’ seniority and homeowners to boot.”

The Centrism of the SWP and the Tasks of the Minority - By Jim Robertson & Larry Ireland, September 6, 1962

“Against this background of defeat and of isolation from the direct class struggle, the political decay of the aging leadership of the Party, from which a whole generation was missing, was inevitable.”

“Having no taste over a sustained period of even small victories, seeing the class reject them and turn to relative passivity or even reaction, the old leadership of the Party, aided by younger elements trained in a petty-bourgeois political milieu, lost confidence in the class and its own ability to achieve victory.”

The Tendency and the Party - by Geoffrey White, 10 October 1962

The IBT’s degeneration is not simply due to objective conditions. The many wrong policies of the leadership also inevitably had a negative effect. In particular many organizational practices which it inherited from the SL, but failed to transcend, inevitably took on an independent life of their own as the group’s existence increasingly became divorced from its initial revolutionary purpose until becoming transformed into an end in itself. The pressures for bureaucratization under such circumstances are obviously quite strong as much of the rank and file grows passive and depoliticized while the leadership’s unchecked power and control in the group increases by leaps and bounds. Leon Trotsky referred to this process as a “Thermidorean reaction.” James P. Cannon summed up the phenomenon in all its various historical manifestations in this way;

“There is nothing revolutionary about the bureaucrats. They fear the masses and distrust them and are always swept aside during periods of upsurge. Only when the masses quiet down do the bureaucrats have their day—the gray people of the ebb tide. You see this manifested in all workers’ organizations in all mutations of the class struggle, from strikes to revolutions, and from trade unions to the organs of state power.”

The Road to Peace - James P. Cannon (1951)

In the aftermath of a series of very public (and many not public) resignations and splits (not to mention the loss of their Ruhr local in Germany), and the resulting breaking of relations of various groups and sympathizers, the IBT, after a lengthy period of radio silence on the matter, has decided to use its recently published International Conference report as an opportunity to partially acknowledge and rationalize its deep crisis to a by now largely already aware left public (combined with an explicit attempt to blackmail our organization into silence). For those few deluded enough in its periphery who possibly expected any honest attempt to seriously look at the problems (we estimate that since our exit the IBT is now down to around 20 people after losing around a third of its people) and the conditions behind them, the IBT's peerless "leader" (Tom Riley) and the spineless hacks who protect his every move choose to offer this instead;

"In assessing our work since our 2008 conference, we noted that despite some limited successes (e.g., gaining supporters in France and Poland), we have yet to make any major breakthroughs internationally and have in fact suffered some reverses. In 2010, one recently-recruited comrade left the IBT to become an anarchist in the aftermath of the explosive protests against the G-20 in Toronto. More significantly, we failed to win over members of the Coletivo Lenin (CL) in Rio de Janeiro, some of whom eventually aligned themselves with Sam T., a talented but troubled former IBT member who departed in September 2008 after deciding he was no longer prepared to carry out the directives of the organization. Our failure to win the Brazilian comrades came as the disappointing culmination of several years of effort and represented the loss of what had appeared to be a promising opportunity to undertake work in an extremely important part of the world."

"Capitalist Crisis & Revolutionary Opportunity: Sixth International Conference of the IBT" - 1917 #34, 2012

That's it, with much of the rest of the report consisting of some rather undeserved self-praise.

We may choose to comment more broadly on the IBT's conference "report" in a future article, but for now will limit ourselves to addressing the self-amnestying head-in the sand explanations offered above.

"Defaming the Accuser"

On Sept. 25 2008 Samuel Trachtenberg resigned from the International Bolshevik Tendency with his resignation letter ("The Road out of Rileyville" – previous issue) describing some of the key points in the history of the IBT's bureaucratic degeneration and announcing his intention to continue struggling to rebuild a revolutionary group that can play a role in helping rebuild the Fourth international. As the IBT's report conveys, confounding their expectations of quick failure, that intention was eventually met with some limited but real success at the IBT's expense. That initial expectation is why the IBT initially chose not to inform its readers of the public resignation in its Fifth International Conference Report written shortly after his split.

Rather than re-iterating all the points made, we invite the reader to look over that resignation letter to see if there is any attempt to deal with the issues raised in the IBT's description of events. There is none. The reason for this is rather simple. An attempt to deny the truth of any part of the resignation statement (and subsequent material) would force us to take the necessary time to give even more proof of our contentions by going into more, for IBT peerless leader Tom Riley, scandalous and embarrassing details on his years of bureaucratic abuse of his leadership position and dishonest manipulations of other left organizations. As Riley is fond of saying, silence is the better part of valor.

Instead the report attempts to externally continue its previous internal campaign to label Trachtenberg's descriptions of bureaucratic corruption as a product of being "troubled." Trachtenberg's resignation letter noted

"Yet when I raised this issue (along with many other similar ones), comrades gave the same response Seymour did combined with a gross campaign to convince me that my criticisms stemmed from —mental illness. While I do have a history of depression, I am not insane and am perfectly capable of recognizing reality and the leadership's attempts to use the same devices with me it's used with other critics."

“The term for such practices is "gaslighting" and I'd urge comrades to do a Google search on it. The fact that Bill Logan, a mental health 'professional', has used his credentials for such disgusting factional purposes magnifies the corruption involved...”

The resignation letter also noted the use of similar techniques against internal critics by other bureaucratic leader cults such as the Revolutionary Workers League. Jason Wright, the IBTer currently being groomed as eventual successor to Tom Riley's crown of shit, as a former RWL member himself described being given such treatment as a response to his criticisms (see “Letter (circa 1998) by the IBT's Jason Wright documenting his leaving the Revolutionary Workers League” online at our site). At the time Wright noted “this sort of thing is not the healthy functioning of a revolutionary organization... and is enough alone (without even addressing the plethora of RWL programmatic deviations) to insure they have no right to claim the mantle of Trotskyism”. We are in full agreement at least on that much.

Of course the IBT leadership is already (inadvertently) on public record on how they would seek to properly deal with external critics (see “Published and be Damned”, page 21) which we would also urge readers to look at. The piece, amongst other things, documents an attempt to provoke “a cornered rat reaction of physical violence which would have been useful to the PRG [former name of the New Zealand IBT section] in discrediting Peter in his probable future career of anti-PRG 'expert'.” Bill Logan (IBT's second in command) reprimanded some squeamish comrades about his attempts to frame up and slander a critic of his bureaucratism that “My own sense is that the comrades are being a little over-critical of me, a little too scrupulous about the proper mode in which political struggle is conducted.” Whatever else anyone would ever accuse the IBT leadership of, scrupulous would never be it.

None of these practices are new. The IBT in better years described similar methods by the Spartacist League.

“We predict that you will not print this letter in its entirety. To do so would mean confirming or denying the above charges in print; to do either would be equally damaging to the reputation of the SL leadership. To deny them would contradict the direct experience of every SL member and sympathizer who saw the picture of Jaruzelski (clearly on display for months in the maintenance department of your New York headquarters), who contributed to Robertson's house, who spent many hours constructing the playroom and installing the hot tub. A direct denial would expose your leadership as cynical, unmitigated liars in the eyes of all these members and sympathizers.”

“If, on the other hand, you were to confirm these allegations, and say that, as head of a supposedly Marxist organization, Robertson is fully entitled to enjoy a materially privileged lifestyle at your members' expense, and that Jaruzelski deserves a place of honor on your walls, you would forever forfeit any claim to be taken seriously as a Trotskyist organization, and reveal yourselves to the world as the degenerate personality cult you have become. It would then be highly improbable that any rational human being would ever want to support or join the Spartacist League.”

“You therefore resort to the only dodge available to a culprit on the spot: to divert attention from the accusations by sowing confusion and defaming the accuser. An ordinary gangster might attempt to impugn the reputation of a witness against him by calling the latter a rapist or a drug addict; you respond to the testimony of the Bolshevik Tendency with a battery of epithets specifically designed to discredit us in the eyes of leftists and Trotskyists: anti-Soviet renegades, trade-union bureaucrats, racists, agent-provocateurs, etc. And just in case these specifically leftist terms of opprobrium do not have the desired effect, a few more ordinary accusations—e.g., “petty criminal”—are thrown in for good measure. These tactics—all in the worst traditions of Gerry Healy and David North—should prompt the more thoughtful readers of *Workers Vanguard* to ask themselves: “Why should anyone believe James Robertson?”

"Truth or Consequences"- 1917 #8, Summer 1990

An earlier piece described a similar attempt to frame up and discredit a founding member of the IBT by the SL.

“[Bob] Mandel’s long record as a prominent Bay Area leftist was a prime asset for the Bay Area SL for all the years he was an SL supporter. Today, however, it is a liability for Robertson & Co. so he has become the target of some particularly unpleasant attacks by the SL leadership....”

“At the time, Mandel was in the midst of a financial/personal crisis precipitated by his years-long blacklisting in the ILWU. He was also distraught and badly shaken by the prospect of separation from the political tendency to which he had devoted his life. Mandel did everything he could to prove his loyalty to the organization. He was presented with a statement penned by Al Nelson. The statement reads like an FBI-style confession. It begins: ‘I freely admit the following statements to be true and understand they are to be filed as a confidential statement with the Central Committee of the Spartacist League...’ This bogus ‘confession,’ composed of some pretty bizarre allegations, as well as various other statements, a few of which are true, was intended to be used to discredit Mandel publicly in the future. Having signed it, he found himself in a Catch-22 situation which the SL leadership has since sought to exploit. Mandel certainly made a big mistake in blindly signing such a ‘confession,’ but the whole incident casts an unpleasant light on the routine practices of the SL leadership.”

"Warren Street: 'Home of the Whoppers'" - *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt* #3, 3, May 1984

Sam who?

The report also interestingly chooses not to mention neither "Revolutionary Regroupment" nor "Samuel Trachtenberg" by name, which would easily show up on most search engines. Instead it refers to only "Sam T."

The IBT is forced by circumstances to acknowledge our existence for those who already know, while trying to do so in a manner that shields our group’s identity for their readers who don’t in case they are curious enough to want to read what we may have to say on all this. This is Tom Riley’s understanding of what he calls “tactical acuity.” A former IBT associate noted that no doubt Bernie Maddoff called what he did using similar terms. Such crude bluffs, combined with a grossly transparent gladhand personality, are indications why for many of those who have met him, the IBT’s peerless leader is referred to as the “used car salesman of ostensible Trotskyism”.

Blackmail

The other purpose of the “troubled” accusation is an attempt to engage in implicit blackmail to force Revolutionary Regroupment to keep quiet about the IBT leadership’s anti-socialist corruption on penalty of discussing sensitive areas of Trachtenberg’s personal life in public. This was previously attempted in a February 9, 2011 letter sent to the Coletivo Lenin and Trachtenberg in the aftermath of the CL breaking relations with the International Bolshevik Tendency and establishing fraternal relations with Revolutionary Regroupment (see December 2010 statement, page 12).

“We had not previously advised you of Sam’s September 2008 resignation from the IBT, or his attempt to project himself as a ‘competing organization’ (via his website), because we considered it pretty much a non-event and we sought to avoid public discussion of the severe personal problems that we believe underlay his political trajectory...

“We have no idea what could lead you to imagine that Sam was ‘driven out,’ or that his membership was “transform[ed] into a fiction.” There was never any attempt to exploit the personal/psychological problems that make it impossible for him to hold a job, leave home or do many other things that are usual for people in their late 30s. We tried to help him to the extent we could, but there is no question that mental-health problems did impact his functioning in the group, as he himself admitted on several occasions.”

“Sam presented us with the difficult problem of trying to deal with a valuable cadre who develops political/organizational differences that are, at least in part, a result of his own fragile mental/emotional condition.”

We think this makes it pretty clear that such attempts at exploitation did indeed occur, during and after. This would be especially scandalous for the IBT in light of Bill Logan’s well known record as a former Spartacist leader which was rife with just such exploitation of the details of comrades’ personal lives, which included driving one rank and file Spartacist member to attempt suicide. As a previously quoted document (“Published and Be Damned”) demonstrates, none of that has changed qualitatively despite Logan’s claims to be a changed person upon joining the IBT. Logan, and his puppetmaster Riley, of course also share this, and many other traits, with corrupt bureaucrats of past periods (see for example James P. Cannon’s evaluation of Jay Lovestone on page 11).

We will clear the air on these matters.

As previously noted Sam Trachtenberg has suffered from depression for many years. That does not make him crazy, “troubled” or incapable of recognizing reality and making rational political judgments. The IBT would not have had him as a high profile member who also wrote many of their documents for so many years if that was true. The IBT leadership would not also allow many present IBTers who also have a history of depression (and who will know what to expect if they were to ever raise any differences in the future) to be members if they truly believed that. The reality is they don’t believe these accusations but are simply using them as a tool for blackmail and psychological warfare.

Sam Trachtenberg several years ago was also forced to leave work and drop out of graduate school after becoming ill with, an ultimately fatal if untreated, rare medical condition which went undiagnosed for many years. We do not believe being disabled and unemployed makes one unfit to be a revolutionary or incapable of making rational and intelligent political choices. We don’t think most on the left do either.

Sam Trachtenberg, as some who know him on the left already know, also has a parent who has been severely ill since he was a child.

While being forced to discuss sensitive details of one’s personal life in front of the public is uncomfortable, none of these things are in any way scandalous or unethical, unlike many aspects of the IBT leaderships personal (not to mention political/organizational as already discussed) lives.

While we are on the subject, we would like to ask just what kind job does the IBT leadership believe that Trachtenberg should have or had (and before getting ill he had various). Like the job Jason Wright (party name) had for several years working at a clerical position under the Dept. of Homeland Security on the docks in upstate New York? The one he was encouraged to take by Riley and the IBT leadership as a useful temporary position for climbing up the civil service ladder and which was to be kept strictly secret from the left public? No, neither Sam Trachtenberg nor any other present or future Revolutionary Regroupment member ever had or will have such a job.

The IBT’s attempts to silence us will not succeed!

[Note: See our exchange with the IBT on this section of the polemic on our web site]

Turmoil in Toronto

The IBT report makes mention of a prominent Toronto comrade who left to become an anarchist activist in a local Platformist group. It gives no mention of the reasons behind his decision to leave (see “Brandon Gray’s Resignation Letter” 7/17/10, online at our site). While the issues he initially left over were related to tactical questions over the 2010 G-20 protests, questions we are not in a position to take definite positions on from afar, it is clear from the letter these issues were the final straw related to a broader developing critique of the IBT’s degeneration, which included an aristocratic snob

disdain for militant young activists in favor of pursuing more respectable (and organizationally passive in the face of bureaucratic intimidation) elements within academia. (The Platypus Affiliated Society, for whom the IBT has recently traveled all over the US to speak at their panels, being a good example). Like many who have witnessed bureaucratic corruption in pseudo-Leninist sects, he ultimately concluded the roots of the IBT's bureaucratism lay with its claim to Bolshevism.

It is also clear that his decision to leave the IBT were prompted by witnessing the sort of corruption described in Sam Trachtenberg's resignation letter. Here are large excerpts which describe the internal situation.

"I formally joined the IBT in the spring of 2009 after being a sympathizer working with the group for two years in Toronto. The high level of programmatic education earned my confidence and respect despite the small size of the group relative to others. However, when the resignation of Sam Trachtenberg in New York came to light I took some time to investigate his case and delayed applying for full-time membership. The political criticisms raised by Sam. were never explained to me. Instead, damning personal attacks were made against his credibility. Personal health issues were ruthlessly exploited and distorted in order to discredit him and avoid articulating any of his criticisms. Unable to recognize these attacks for what they were, I submitted my application and after being accepted, I brought up the fact that I had taken a good look at Sam's case before finalizing my decision to join. I was told he was paranoid and delusional, and that it was a good thing he left so the leadership didn't have to work even harder to push him out. I regret that I did not contact Sam at the time to get his side of the split, but in my defense, my personal ties to the younger comrades in the TBT local influenced me to leave the issue in the past though I kept my suspicions in the back of my mind for a day when more information would come to light.

"At a 15 April 2010 local meeting it was suggested that a comrade who roughly fit my own description in terms of my limited relationship with Sam 'befriend' him on a social media site in order to monitor him and relay information back to the leadership. I was the only person to comment on that point, stating that I would be the best candidate for such a job but that I don't feel comfortable with it; that it felt dishonest and wrong. Riley merely shrugged and dismissed my objections by saying it wasn't so bad and I shouldn't have a problem with it. This was another weird side of the organization to which I responded with dismay. Could Samuel Trachtenberg be accurately describing the internal workings of my group? The validity of his case had grown with time and now a concrete example of unhealthy leadership practices had been demonstrated to me. I must now conclude that a disgusting campaign of lies and slander was used against Sam in order to push him out after he made various correct criticisms of the leadership. I now agree with Sam's criticisms and urge comrades to look at them with open eyes.

"As everyone in the IBT knows, membership has continued to decline since Sam in New York left the group. The dropping off of long-time supporters such as L. in NYC and the dismissal of W.'s attempt to transfer to our local was merely brushed aside because they were 'old' and 'useless.' An appropriate political explanation was not given. Our London local is constantly trashed for various reasons that seem unfair to me. More recently it has been announced that we should expect the 'likely' loss of A. in Ireland who is a long-time comrade of the group and probably one of our most energetic members in terms of adapting to tactical realities and functioning with keen initiative. I recognized at the time that it was no accident that yet another of our most energetic, engaging and least abstentionist comrades who was working outside of the direct supervision of either Riley or Logan had become a target for being pushed out. The only value this comrade had according to our local and international leader was that he is one of our few comrades who can maintain the website, hence, he will be kept around as long as is convenient. It is also no coincidence that he was my only supporter when I raised my criticisms.

"After recruiting a couple members in recent years, in large part due to the interventions of their youngest comrades, the TBT local is now shrinking back down in size and everywhere else our membership continues to contract under the burden of a bureaucratic leadership. Contact sessions have consistently broken down after

initially showing promise and there seems to be little expectation of winning over Toronto leftists to the group in the foreseeable future. Our performance during the G20 protests has only made our prospects worse.

“Some time ago, when it was indicated that the fusion talks with a group of contacts in Latin America were probably not going to work out because the contacts had demanded we do what our leadership described as ‘OCAP-type entry work’ I was unsure if this was inevitable. As a rank and file member of the IBT I was never privy to any discussions with these comrades and news of our progress with them only came from our senior leaders who constantly portrayed them less as dedicated revolutionaries, and more as naïve children with silly ideas floating around in their heads, despite the fact that they were working under much harsher conditions than us. This is an even more bureaucratic repeat of the way our leadership botched similar fusion talks in the past.

“It is amazing how much the 9/5/81 resignation letter to the Spartacist League by HK, our most senior comrade, applies to our situation

“For about a year I have been moving toward the conclusion that distortions in the leadership of sections, locals, and fractions have developed and matured--at least in part from an internal life characterized by a defensive, hierarchical regime combined with a personalistic, Jesuitical method of internal argument and discussion. This process is advanced to the point where the S.L./S.Y.L. membership is increasingly composed of ‘true believers’ or cynics. I suspect that the incidents of political and tactical incompetence in the S.L. are connected with this deterioration of internal life. I think the central leadership has consciously and cynically concluded that the membership of the S.L. is too weak politically and personally to allow even the slightest disagreement with the leadership. There is an implied arithmetical equation: disagreement with the leadership equals hostility to the leadership equals disloyalty equals betrayal. Carried further, these trends will see the S.L. come to resemble less a principled, proletarian combat organization than a theocratic, hierarchical, political cult.”

“When internal critics struggling to give criticism in order to better build the organization are branded as traitors and apolitical slanders are used to discredit them, honest revolutionaries cannot continue to remain silent.....

“If history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce, then what do we say about the third and fourth time? At minimum there is an unhealthy pattern occurring that stretches back through the IBT and into the SL. Lifelong permanent leaders grow to dominate the organizations they create which they take down with them. This is a problem that cannot simply be remedied by creating a new copy of the old group.

“Sadly, our own outgrowth from Robertson's school of party building has followed the same path as each subsequent challenger to Riley and Logan's leadership fell away over the past decades. While Robertson had his style, his protégées carry on the tradition of manipulation and maneuvering in their own personal style of ‘informal sanctions’ and behind the scenes maneuvers against opponents to retain control of the group. While Robertson's group managed to partially break out of their marginalization in the early 1970s, our own group has not and almost 3 decades later our publications have been plagued with the same sort of publication infrequency and delay found in the early years of the Spartacist League as the leadership control and monopoly of even the most minor detail of organizational life has suffocated and stifled the ability of new comrades to learn and develop.

“It is far past due for every honest comrade to speak out against the organizational degeneration inside the International Bolshevik Tendency. I hope I will not be the last to do so.

“Spy vs. Spy”

One element of the IBT's degeneration which is touched on in Brandon's letter is rooted in the Spartacist League's distorted understanding of revolutionary regroupment and fighting revisionism, based partially on a distorted and overgeneralized understanding of the "French Turn" experience. The orientation comes down to a scorched earth policy towards all other groups on the left.

"At a 15 April 2010 local meeting it was suggested that a comrade who roughly fit my own description in terms of my limited relationship with Sam 'befriend' him on a social media site in order to monitor him and relay information back to the leadership."

Our understanding of revolutionary regroupment is that along with fusions large elements of it will also include splits *based on struggles for programmatic clarity*. For the SL and IBT though, their practices have been well described by others, such as the Workers Power group,

"There are two distortions of the concept of a fighting propaganda group here. First, the fighting propaganda group is portrayed as a stage during which the main task is to 'destroy' other groups. Note the choice of words. The Spartacists seek not to win leftward moving centrists to communism, but to destroy them. This perspective leads characteristically to politically disloyal manoeuvres and provocations."

"After the splits the splinters, 1961-1983" (1983)

The disloyal provocations involve, amongst other things, sending agents to infiltrate other organizations (as opposed to openly joining a multi-tendency group, as in an entry) and using a variety of unprincipled deceptions to either gather information or disrupt and split ones opponent. Since unfortunately in periods of isolation, as described by Marx and Engels **(1)**, such practices tend to flourish on the left, the IBT and the SL are not the only groups to do this. This leads to drawing hard organizational rather than programmatic lines as people on the left feel incapable of trusting each other and prevents discussions and debates from happening. It destroys rather than helps build possibilities for regroupment around the important programmatic questions. This develops into the spectacle s of different left groups relating to each other in a manner similar to the "Spy vs. Spy" comic strip in *Mad* magazine. It also tends to get generalized as the leaderships of such groups inevitably use the same methods internally that they use externally to maintain control. This is also largely what happened inside the SL and IBT.

Brandon was principled enough to turn down such a dirty assignment. Others in the IBT have not been. A more publicized example of this in IBT history relates to the 1998 recruitment of the Marxist Educational Group from Albany which was described with great fanfare. The report on its Second International Conference (with the section titled "Two, Three, Many MEGS!") described it as

"In early 1998 the MEG contacted both the IBT and Internationalist Group (led by the SL's former editor Jan Norden). This led to a series of discussions both written and verbal, with groups focusing on the Russian question, the general strike, and the history of the SL's political degeneration. Ultimately the comrades concluded that the IBT was the most consistent representative of the revolutionary programmatic heritage of the RT and early SL."

"Weathering the Storm" - 1917 #21, 1999

Also in a special bulletin devoted to the Internationalist Group.

"Initially the MEG comrades thought that the IBT and IG merely disagreed over the precise chronology of the SL's degeneration, but they gradually came to see that more substantive issues were involved."

Trotskyist Bulletin #6 September 1999

The problem with this innocent enough sounding description is that it was untrue. What really happened was that the MEG was first recruited to the IBT and then approached the IG pretending to be “independents” trying to investigate the differences between the IBT and IG. During the entire time Riley was bragging with glee about “playing Norden like a fiddle.” It is doubtful the IG was naïve enough not to know that is what the IBT was doing. It is also clear that whatever minute possibilities for fusions existed were destroyed by such “acute tactics.”

In the end it gave the IBT some good factional publicity about having an independent group choose the IBT after seriously investigating them and the IG. It was also partially true, except that they made that investigation and chose the IBT *before* approaching the IG as IBT agents pretending to be “independents.”

Such practices have previously been described by the SL when discussing Gerry Healy's group as

“using their [members] loyalty to the professed ideals of socialism to make them complicit in crimes against their comrades and the comrades of other groups.”

quoted in "The Robertson School of Party Building", 1917 #1, Winter 1986

Those who make themselves complicit tie themselves that much more strongly to the one they are committing the crime for, in practice burning ones bridges to others on the left through such methods. It is not accidental Trotskyists have always had nothing but scorn for the GPU infiltrators the Stalinists used against them.

Mr. “Tactical Acuity” Strikes Again

The IBT report gives no explanation of why it lost perhaps its biggest regroupment opportunity in years in such an important country like Brazil, except for it somehow being connected to Samuel Trachtenberg being “troubled.” We would refer our readers to the Coletivo Lenin’s statement at the time for a thorough explanation of how after three years of being maneuvered and manipulated the CL finally saw through the IBT’s “acute tactics.”

Tragically in the aftermath of three years of working for a fusion with a group they had taken to be sincerely revolutionary but discovering otherwise, some CL members left the group while others who remained became demoralized and open to going along with a senior members conclusions that the IBT’s bureaucratism and dishonesty was rooted in its Trotskyism. A document of the majority faction which arose after the split with the IBT declared

"In the following chapters we will demonstrate that it is impossible to formulate a correct strategy for world revolution without a correct analysis of the decay of capitalism, and that this strategy is quite different from the strategies of small Trotskyist-Leninist groups which seek to struggle against the reformist misleaders by mobilizing the masses around transitional demands leading to the conquest of state power. We will also show why the Fourth International was not destroyed by Pabloite revisionism, but by its inability to overcome the Leninist legacy of basing ones strategy on imminent world revolution.”

"The Theory of Decay and the Crisis of the Third and Fourth International" (2011)

Once again the IBT succeeded in helping discredit Trotskyism with its practices.

Those members who were primarily responsible for writing the statement establishing fraternal relations with Revolutionary Regroupment struggled against this degeneration and are now the Revolutionary Regroupment group in Brazil.

What the reports non-explanation does bring to mind is the previous time the IBT destroyed its regroupment opportunities in Latin America, once again due to IBT’s peerless leader Tom Riley’s uncontrollable penchant for exercising his “tactical acuity”. A similar dishonest head in the sand non-explanation was given in the IBT’s Fourth International Conference Report for its failure to recruit a group of promising Argentine comrades.

"A less public, but more significant, setback was our failure to successfully regroup with a small circle of Argentine comrades who appeared to be rather close to us programmatically. This is partly attributable to language difficulties, but a more important factor was a gap in political culture manifested in differences over the tasks and priorities of a micro-propaganda group. In retrospect, we concluded: 'Given our capacities and very limited resources there is not obviously a lot more we could have done to advance this collaboration, but it represents a lost opportunity.'"

"Swimming Against the Stream" - 1917 #28, 2006

Actually there were no "differences over the tasks and priorities of a micro-propaganda group." Since the Argentine group had by then gone out of existence the IBT felt safe in its blatant lying, expecting no one to contradict it. The real issues were less "political."

The Argentine comrades who established relations with the IBT (and translated most of the IBT's current Spanish language material) were ostensibly invited to participate in the IBT's internal life though participation in its discussion list. This was to speed up the fusion process. What the IBT tactical geniuses never chose to inform them of was that the entire IBT membership was put under discipline not to respond to anything they wrote, rather the leadership would do it after conferring amongst themselves collectively. Supposedly these comrades were to be too stupid and clueless to notice that while other posts had IBTers quickly responding with comments, no one responded to their posts except Bill Logan several day later, after conferring with the rest of leadership and giving what read more as a formal collective statement than an informal response as everyone else on the list received. Those, such as Sam Trachtenberg, who noted the Argentine comrades growing dissatisfaction were reprimanded for responding and assured that the Argentine comrades had no clue as to what was going on, despite his pleas that they either be truly given full access to our internal life as promised or at least told the truth about the situation. As predicted, the Argentine comrades chose to suddenly announce their decision to break all relations with the IBT without giving any reason. What were they to say after all? If they gave the true reason they would be told nothing of the sort was happening and that they were being paranoid. That would have simply made the break really ugly and angry after such an insult to their intelligence. They instead chose to leave the situation with some dignity.

May we suggest to the few subjectively revolutionary elements around the IBT that this recent record indicates that rather than being "tactically acute" geniuses, the IBT leaders are actually tactical *morons*. That their bureaucratic "Spy vs. Spy" methods have effectively transformed what was at one time a promising group into bureaucratized sect organized this time around Tom Riley, rather than Jim Robertson, Gerry Healy, Jack Barnes or Bob Avakian etc. That a leadership with such an organizationally criminal record deserves to be expelled and repudiated rather than uncritically championed (or even grudgingly tolerated for that matter). If in reality no mechanism (whatever the pure formalities) exist amongst what are now the mostly older, passive and depoliticized ranks for expelling them, it is time to rebuild. Revolutionary Regroupment is determined to do precisely that.

March 2012

Notes:

1) "I would also ask you to be rather discreet with all people connected with Bakunin. It is in all sects to stick together and intrigue. You may rest assured that any information you give them will immediately be passed on to Bakunin. It is one of his fundamental principles that keeping promises and the like are merely bourgeois prejudices, which a true revolutionary must treat with disdain to help along the cause. In Russia they say this openly. In Western Europe it is secret lore..."

Engels to Cuno 1/24/72

Appendix #1: James P. Canonon on Jay Lovestone

Excerpt from a July 14, 1955 letter sent to historian Theodore Draper that was subsequently reprinted from The First Ten Years of American Communism. Full document can be read online at Marxist Internet Archive (www.marxists.org).

It was everybody's opinion that Lovestone was unscrupulous in his ceaseless machinations and intrigues; and in my opinion everybody was right on that point, although the word "unscrupulous" somehow or other seems to be too mild a word to describe his operations. Lovestone was downright crooked, like Foster-but in a different way. Foster was in and of the workers' movement and had a sense of responsibility to it; and he could be moderately honest when there was no need to cheat or lie. Foster's crookedness was purposeful and utilitarian, nonchalantly resorted to in a pinch to serve an end. Lovestone, the sinister stranger in our midst, seemed to practice skulduggery maliciously, for its own sake.

It was a queer twist of fate that brought such a perverse character into a movement dedicated to the service of the noblest ideal of human relationships. Never was a man more destructively alien to the cause in which he sought a career; he was like an anarchistic cancer cell running wild in the party organism. The party has meaning and justification only as the conscious expression of the austere process of history in which the working class strives for emancipation, with all the strict moral obligations such a mission imposes on its members. But Lovestone seemed to see the party as an object of manipulation in a personal game he was playing, with an unnatural instinct to foul things up.

In this game, which he played with an almost pathological frenzy, he was not restrained by any recognized norms of conduct in human relations, to say nothing of the effects his methods might have on the morale and solidarity of the workers' movement. For him the class struggle of the workers, with its awesome significance for the future of the human race, was at best an intellectual concept; the factional struggle for "control" of the party was the real thing, the real stuff of life. His chief enemy was always the factional opponent in the party rather than the capitalist class and the system of exploitation they represent.

Lovestone's factional method and practice were systematic miseducation of the party; whispered gossip to set comrades against each other; misrepresentation and distortion of opponents' positions; unrestrained demagoguery and incitement of factional supporters until they didn't know whether they were coming or going. He had other tricks, but they were all on the same order.

The party leaders' opinions of each other in those days varied widely and were not always complimentary; but at bottom, despite the bitterness of the conflicts, I think they respected each other as comrades in a common cause, in spite of all. Lovestone, however, was distrusted and his devotion to the cause was widely doubted. In intimate circles Foster remarked more than once that if Lovestone were not a Jew, he would be the most likely candidate for leadership of a fascist movement. That was a fairly common opinion.

Appendix #2: Coletivo Lenin/Brazil breaks relations with the International Bolshevik Tendency - December 2010

With the following statement, the Coletivo Lenin/Brazil publically breaks off relations with the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) and establishes fraternal relations with Revolutionary Regroupment, an IBT split from 2008.

I – The origins of our contact with the IBT

The Coletivo Comunista Internacionalista – CCI (forerunner of the Coletivo Lenin) was set up in October 2006 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. We were a Trotskyist group of a few militants who were sure of one thing: we could never remain a national organization. For Trotskyists, it is necessary that a revolutionary organization to belong to a world party or strive to build one. We therefore, from the very beginning, made a serious attempt to study the different political currents which claimed

the legacy of Trotskyism. We conducted research into 27 organizations that had their origins in the Fourth International, studying their documents on the internet and having meetings with those organizations that had sections in Brazil. We looked to join an organization whose political understanding was closest to our own. At that time our three main criteria were:

- 1) That the current considered the destruction of USSR and the deformed workers' states in East Europe as counterrevolutionary defeats. That consequently, it would have been necessary to have temporarily entered into military blocs with those sections of the Stalinist bureaucracy opposed to capitalist restoration whenever they showed any resistance.
- 2) That the current should recognize the politically strategic importance of fighting against all forms of special oppression (such as sexism, racism and homophobia) for a successful socialist revolution. That the current therefore prioritize recruiting workers who suffer those forms of oppression, who are also usually the most exploited workers under capitalism.
- 3) That the current should reject the notion that the productive forces had ceased developing in the imperialist epoch, since only through such a rejection was it possible to make a coherent analysis of contemporary capitalism.

We discovered that those currents which traced their political origins to the early Spartacist League/USA (SL/USA) most closely fit that criterion. They were the Spartacist League (and its international co-thinkers in the International Communist League) itself and two splits – the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) and the Internationalist Group (IG). In the course of studying their documents, the issues they were arguing over appeared small, but they were also over many questions and issues that were completely new to us.

We learned that the SL had taken up a variety of strange positions by the end of the 1970's. In 1979, while correctly siding with the Soviet Army against CIA backed Islamic fundamentalists, their response to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was to also raise the uncritical slogan "Hail Red Army!" Similar pro-Stalinist adaptations followed, such as organizing a contingent at a protest named the "Yuri Andropov Brigade" after the leader of the USSR at the time, and responding to criticisms by then printing a poem in his honor on the front page of their newspaper following his death. Adaptations to US national chauvinist pressures were also expressed such as the 1983 failure to militarily side with forces in Lebanon struggling to drive out the US Marines occupying their country. When a bomb then exploded at the Marine barracks the SL raised the call "Marines Out of Lebanon, Now, Alive." These criticisms were raised by the IBT. A criticism raised by both of the split groups was the bureaucratic organizational degeneration the SL had gone through by that point. The SL was transformed into an organization with little internal life; the leadership was in the hands of a bureaucratic clique which suppressed its internal critics and stifled debates through threats, intimidation and repression. Through such methods all critics were effectively driven out or, when that failed, expelled.

That was why we were repulsed by the SL and felt closer to the IG and IBT from the very start. At this point we established discussions with both groups with the objective of studying the degeneration of the Spartacist League, whose earlier politics we were in close agreement with and believed (and still believe) provided an important programmatic foundation for rebuilding a revolutionary Fourth International.

We engaged in personal meetings and online chats with Bill Logan and a few other IBT members and had personal meetings with the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil (LQB), the IG's Brazilian comrades in the League for the Fourth International. We also had some personal meetings with IG's main international leader, Jan Norden. After a period, we realized that the IBT's analysis of the SL's degeneration was more coherent than the IG's. For example, the IBT argued that the SL's deliberate destructions of their trade union caucuses in early 80's was a clear demonstration that the organization's leaders main priority was keeping the ranks under tight control rather than building a base in the working class. The IG on the other hand argued the SL's degeneration only began from the point they were pushed out in 1996. The very similar organizational measures through which several future members of IBT were driven out or expelled in the late 1970's and

early 1980's were ignored, denied or defended in their analysis. The IG also defended all the SL's positions (including the mentioned positions on Afghanistan, Yuri Andropov and Lebanon) before the period of their expulsion as well.

One question that the IG sought to use against the IBT was the scandal surrounding Bill Logan. Bill Logan (who had been a prominent leader of the Spartacists in New Zealand and Australia during the 1970's) was expelled from the International Spartacist Tendency on grounds of being a "sexual psychopath" who suppressed his internal critics and psychologically manipulated his ranks. We were aware that Logan, like most other SL leader, was guilty of bureaucratic abuses and organizational crimes. But we also knew that the IG was looking to exploit the scandal surrounding Logan to deflect from responding to the IBT's criticisms of their politics. Unfortunately, at that time we also took the IBT at their word that they had not inherited any of the SL's bureaucratic organizational methods and that Logan personally had profoundly changed his ways.

In the aftermath of Bill Logan's visit to Brazil in October 2007, we decided amongst ourselves on a perspective of fusing with the IBT. We believed our few outstanding differences and questions were insufficient for continuing to remain a separate group for too long. We hoped in time many of these differences would be resolved through discussions and were willing to co-exist in a common group as disciplined comrades. What actually occurred during the entire subsequent period though was the consistent frustration of attempts at discussions by the IBT's leadership, whose ultimatums and stalling tactics towards discussing our differences were very apparently geared towards wearing us out and demoralizing us into complete submission as the price for fusion. It gradually became obvious that the IBT's leadership was not looking for political fusions with militants who, while sharing their political analysis, also had secondary political and tactical differences to debate internally, but rather looking to transform us into docile pliant hacks who could then be organizationally absorbed into a group where their absolute control was fully safeguarded from future challenges.

Our relations with the IBT in many ways paralleled early Spartacist relations with Gerry Healy's International Committee during the 1960's. Healy similarly feigned interest in a loyal fusion while in reality engaging in a variety of unscrupulous tactics designed to psychologically break a young group of revolutionaries. Like us, along with substantial political agreement, the Spartacists also had their own analytical appreciations of different questions and expressed an apparent capacity to stand up to and challenge Healy's authority. Following the final breaking of relations in 1966, the Spartacists commented;

"The reason for the behavior of the SLL leadership toward the Spartacist delegation is not hard to find. You obviously wish to create a Trotskyist movement in the U.S. which would be completely subservient to the SLL leadership... You were not interested in creating a movement united on the basis of democratic centralism with strong sections capable of making theoretical contributions to the movement as a whole and of applying Marxist theory creatively to their own national arenas. You wanted an international after the manner of Stalin's Comintern, permeated with servility at one pole and authoritarianism at the other."

http://www.regroupment.org/main/page_healy_reconstructs.html

II – Three years of stalling and stagnation

We ended our engagements with the IG in January 2008. In our last discussions with them, we were appalled to hear from Jan Norden himself that the IG/LFI not only defended the SL's adaptations to the Stalinists and failure to advance a revolutionary program during fall of the Soviet bloc, but was also intent on repeating their political behavior if the opportunity arose in the future. We also recognized the bureaucratic nature of IG's League for the Fourth International. The IG in the US was the leadership responsible for formulating all the political decisions and the Brazilian and other sections would simply execute them. This did not correlate with our understanding of Leninist democratic centralism. Our contact with the LQB and the IG's Jan Norden reinforced our decision to seek a fusion with the IBT.

In the course of further relations with the IBT, we were able to identify and correct many of our previous political and organizational misconceptions. From reading their literature we were able to establish a more precise understanding of the nature of the united front tactic (see our document “Leninism, United Fronts and Propaganda Blocs”, available on our web site in Portuguese), develop a more coherent analysis of political developments in Brazil, and learn how to apply the Transitional Program in our daily political work. Studying the history of the Trotskyist movement we expanded our appreciation of the historic significance of the early SL, which sought to uphold the Trotskyist program after the political destruction of the Fourth International and the US Socialist Workers Party by Pabloite revisionism. We started to understand the nature of a propaganda perspective for a small revolutionary organization of our size which, along with engaging in exemplary mass work, would initially need to grow by focusing on winning the politically conscious vanguard to our programmatic conceptions through polemically engaging with other ostensibly revolutionary currents. Most of our political and theoretical direction since early 2008 had been informed by the IBT’s historic writings and perspectives, making us believe we were very methodologically and programmatically close.

At the same time, we also had our own unique theoretical understanding of certain questions that we potentially differed with the IBT on. We sought to discuss these with them as (we thought) we were making progress towards becoming their Brazilian section. Our differences were the following:

- 1) We shared with Rosa Luxemburg her theory of capital accumulation, with its conclusion that capitalism is leading society to barbarism. This position didn’t lead to any practical differences, but simply called attention to our intent to discuss the Leninist understanding of imperialism.
- 2) We were influenced by the theories of Brazilian Marxist Rui Mauro Marini. We regarded countries such as Brazil, India, Israel, Russia and South Africa as sub-imperialist countries rather than dominated neo-colonies. In these countries, the fusion of national and foreign capital establishes a base for them to control and exploit other countries within their region of influence. That would be the case with Brazil and its relationship to other South American countries for example. Therefore, in a hypothetical war between Brazil and Bolivia, we would militarily side with Bolivia against its regional oppressor. We also recognize that sub-imperialist countries are at the same time also dependent countries and would therefore, in turn, defend them against imperialist military attacks. We know that ultimately any real freedom from imperialist oppression, for either the neo-colonies or sub-imperialist countries such as Brazil, can only be achieved through world socialist revolution.
- 3) Like most Latin American organizations, but unlike the IBT and possibly other smaller propaganda groups based in the more economically developed capitalist countries, we have traditionally accepted comrades with religious beliefs into our membership. Since a requirement of membership is agreement with the organizations political positions (including the defense of science, separation of church and state, defending the rights of women, gays and lesbians and other similar questions), we believe this represents the religious comrades’ personal contradiction as long as they maintain the organizations collective discipline. As Marxists we remain materialists and defenders of science, recognize the historic role that organized religion has played in serving the interests of the ruling class and struggle to educate all our militants in that spirit.
- 4) While we argue that the Chinese state is still a deformed workers’ state, we also recognize that large sections of China’s economy have been allowed by its Stalinist rulers to become privatized. These measures have in turn strongly undermined and placed in question the dominance of its traditional (bureaucratic) planned character. We believe these measures initiated by the bureaucrats currently ruling China create large openings and dangers for the victory of capitalist counterrevolution. We also see strong historic parallels with the NEP period of the Soviet Union during the 1920s. There the lack of a developed planned economy combined with a temporary reintroduction of capitalist measures placed in strong question the nature of the dominant economy, but, similarly, was also not decisive in determining the class character of the state.

5) We believed that the IBT was overly focused on continuing to organizationally pursue its historic differences with the SL to the detriment of what should be the main responsibility of a Trotskyist propaganda group, looking to engage with the more dynamic groups that were either in leftward motion or had an active animated rank and file. While we recognized the historic significance of the early Spartacist League and the importance of educating militants about its history and were not arguing for completely ignoring them, the truth is the contemporary Spartacist League (and its co-thinkers in the International Communist League) has for many years now been a shrinking stagnating organization that along with being in rightward political motion had a largely depoliticized rank and file. For what appeared to be similar reasons of continuing to pursue historic differences from their personal pasts, the IBT's leadership planned for us to mainly focus on organizationally pursuing Jan Norden's followers, who, at least in Brazil, have also visibly shrunk and aged over the years. At the same time it seemed to us the IBT had shown far less interest in pursuing groups whose membership can actually play a role in rebuilding the revolutionary movement. We saw this as a tactical difference perhaps arising from the IBT leadership being stuck in a political time warp, without yet fully understanding the reasons for such passivity and routinism.

The IBT's leadership continued to postpone clarifying these issues with us through written discussions over the next two years. They would only, at our insistence, agree to briefly touch on these questions in the course of our online chats dealing with other issues. At the same time they argued for resolving these differences as a precondition for merger. We believed these minor theoretical and tactical differences should not be a bar to unity, since they paled in significance next to our areas of important agreement.

On Luxemburg's accumulation theory and Marini's sub-imperialism, the IBT leadership expressed a total lack of interest in understanding our concerns. We tried summarizing our views on these complex theories and referred them to documents for a deeper study, but they never followed up. On the tactical question involving their focus on the SL/IG and our view on China, the IBT acknowledged that in principle they should not necessarily prevent a fusion, while at the same time they made "resolving" these issues a precondition for organizationally moving forward. On the question of our religious members, the IBT seemed uncertain as they never argued for excluding religious members as a principle, while continuing to use this issue as a barrier to further progress. They seemed uninterested in investigating the experience of the different political culture in Latin America, where members of ostensibly revolutionary organizations have historically been permitted to hold private religious views.

It is important to reiterate that during this entire period we were willing to accept the position of being a disciplined minority on these questions inside the IBT's ranks, since we seemed to have reached agreement on the major issues. By demanding these issues previously be resolved, while barring their resolution for either side by stalling for years on engaging in written discussions, the IBT made moving forward, in practice, impossible. At the same time we were kept in limbo through constant assurances they took the prospect of fusion with us seriously.

For almost three years, we used an adaptation of the IBT document "For Trotskyism!" as our main programmatic statement. We regarded and publically argued (until two months ago) that the IBT represented the programmatic continuity of Trotskyism on our website and in our activities in the workers' and students' movement. We translated all of the documents they used for the Portuguese language section of their web site. Despite this, the IBT refused to publically acknowledge having any relations with us or even our existence. We considered their behavior strange since public recognition of fraternal relations is usually a first step for a future fusion perspective with another organization.

In December 2008 we wrote a letter to IBT demanding a discussion of our outstanding differences and asking them to take practical measures to facilitate the possibility for a future fusion. At that point we began suspecting that perhaps the IBT, despite its claims, had no interest in fusing with us. That they would only fuse with groups who would previously renounce all differences and independent opinions. Such a monolithic "fusion" would require that we first be psychologically broken, thereby ceasing to be revolutionaries.

In early 2009, the CCI became the Coletivo Lenin (CL) following a fusion with a group of comrades who had resigned from the Brazilian PSTU, associated with the late Nahuel Moreno. This represented a qualitative leap in our group's capacities. With some organizational advice from the IBT, we established more intelligent organizational priorities, improved our finances, and established a regular press. We elected a National Leadership, since we were now present in two cities. We also saw the need for the comrades in the newly fused group to start engaging in common work. One way of doing this was to choose to center our work in Rio de Janeiro with a homeless organization, the Internationalist Homeless Front (FIST). It was an opportunity to work with radicalized militants from one of the most exploited and oppressed sectors of Brazilian society.

The IBT responded in a harshly sectarian manner towards our tactical choice. They appeared to believe a propaganda group should completely focus their entire work on other left groups, particularly the Brazilian Nordenites in our case, to the total exclusion of all other possible arenas. We were falsely accused of being movementists who were looking to recruit politically raw people.

In response, some of our comrades began considering the possibility that our differences with the IBT could be more significant than appeared on the surface. The IBT seemed to be extremely passive and conservative, not only in moving forward towards fusing with us but also to trying to do any broader mass work. Because of this we wrote a formal letter to the IBT in October 2009 discussing the recent reorganization of our work and demanding they state more forthrightly their views on the prospects of a fusion and how to proceed towards it. Another letter from February 2010 explained our work in FIST and responded to their criticisms and misconceptions about it.

That letter for the first time elicited a written formal response from the IBT since it stated our refusal to continue engaging in online chats until we receive a document responding to our concerns. Though their answer only strengthened our suspicions that they had a passive/organizationally conservative attitude towards party building, we agreed to have their representative visit us and attend our first conference to be held on August 2010. Up to this time we still believed they were open towards fusing with us.

III – The IBT's conduct at our conference: bureaucratic maneuvers

As part of the process of further consolidating our organization, we organized our first conference with the goal of mapping out the Coletivo Lenin's perspective for the following two years. As is common in any healthy democratic organization in a pre-conference period, three different internal factions arose inside CL. On our relations with IBT, the decisive majority supported continuing to work for a fusion, while a minority, concluding that the IBT was sectarian and passive/conservative, was opposed. As was already our established custom, we shared all our internal documents and opened our internal life to the IBT, (a practice which the IBT never reciprocated on during the entire time). As a result, the IBT became very close to one of the three internal factions.

During the conference (which the IBT's representative participated in) two of the internal factions and the majority of CLers supported fusing with the IBT. The Coletivo Lenin decided to continue pursuing a fusion and requested that the IBT finally start responding to our differences (whose resolution they had always insisted was a precondition for further progress in relations) within the next month since we were also all frustrated and anxious to move forward after three years of stagnating relations. The newly elected leadership was an expression of this decision: it was composed of those comrades who were supporters of fusing with the IBT. At the same time, the CL also decided to take a firmer attitude on ending the 3 years of IBT inaction in further developing relations with us. We asked for concrete proof of the IBT's sincerity in wanting relations to move forward – a statement publically acknowledging our relationship (which the IBT subsequently decided to not do).

The IBT's immediate response stunned us all greatly. After phoning in a report to his leadership, the IBT representative informed us their evaluation was that the CL was organizationally unstable and that the CL was politically moving away

from the IBT (after we had just voted for a direct fusion proposal!). It was true that a minority consisting of one comrade was moving away from the IBT, but the majority's commitment was firm. As for the CL being unstable, our organization had (and still has) an internal life where differences arise and are therefore debated, as we believe every Bolshevik organization should have. That doesn't mean we are organizationally unstable or undisciplined. We now know that for the IBT (which had its last organized faction in late 1997), any serious internal differences with the leadership is a sign of dangerous "instability". Fusing with us represented a danger for a bureaucratic leadership whose primary objective is absolute control over their organization, rather than building a group that can grow, develop and be capable of acting as a vehicle for advancing working class revolution.

The worst, however, was still to come. The day after the conference, while still claiming to desire moving towards a fusion, the IBT secretly "invited" a couple of comrades from the faction closer to it to resign from CL and become the IBT's representatives in Brazil. It is important to look at their decision more closely. First, this indicated to us that all of the differences that the IBT pretended to feel so strongly about (our willingness to accept religious members, sub-imperialism, their SL centered focus) during this entire time was actually meaningless to them, since the comrades they tried to split had the same positions as the rest of the group on these issues. Secondly, it indicated the organizationally unscrupulous character of the IBT's leadership. While claiming to have close comradely fraternal relations with us, they were secretly maneuvering to split us, treating us in reality as a hostile enemy. Thirdly, it displayed a great lack of confidence in their politics and organization which also no doubt reflected a deeper demoralization. While a majority of the CL was not only willing but actively supporting a fusion they preferred to attempt to split our group instead of moving further with us. Fortunately, the comrades turned down their offer and reported it to the rest of Coletivo Lenin.

The impact of the IBT leadership's bureaucratic and disloyal cowardice increased with the passage of time, as our comrades sought to process the recent turn of events and make sense of it in light of all their previous dealing with them. That action on their part made clear to us that the IBT was not willing to fuse with our organization, despite their disingenuous claims to the contrary, but only maneuvering us to try to win a minority of our youngest and least inexperienced militants. They assumed it would then be easy to absorb and assimilate these comrades into their bureaucratized internal culture and convince them to abandon their differences. We were still puzzled though as to why the IBT would behave in a manner so at odds with their professed politics and their past criticisms of their parent organizations bureaucratism.

IV – Revolutionary Regroupment

A few weeks before our conference, we had our first contact with Revolutionary Regroupment's Sam Trachtenberg who split from the IBT in the fall of 2008. The IBT had chosen to never inform us of his resignation and decision to set up a competing organization. Trachtenberg gave a Marxist explanation for the IBT's behavior in his resignation letter entitled "The Road Out of Rileyville" (available online) . He also developed some of that explanation in the course of a brief correspondence we had before our conference. At that point we unfortunately did not give his analysis the sufficient attention it deserved, since we were very eager to carry out a fusion with a group whose positions, on paper, seemed so close to ours and in whom we had already invested three years of work. One of the topics discussed in the conference was a proposal to establish relations with Revolutionary Regroupment. The proposal was rejected, but no doubt also impacted the panicked attempt to wreck our organization by the IBT's leadership. But the analysis (and future predictions) we received from Revolutionary Regroupment fit our experience with the IBT like a glove.

As explained by RR, the IBT over the years had become transformed into a bureaucratized organization controlled and manipulated by a clique of "permanent leaders". Those leaders place their ability to control their organization above their professed claims to want to see the group grow and develop into an instrument for socialist revolution. The IBT was at this stage narrowly dominated by a leadership clique consisting of those who previously also had corrupt histories as SL leaders before being purged by their fellow bureaucrats. With the passage of time, the other senior members (without such corrupt previous histories) who helped found the group either left or were driven out, while the remaining leadership was never

replenished by younger comrades, becoming smaller in composition and acting as a tight self-protective unit in all their dealings with the rank and file.

Meanwhile, after almost 30 years of existence, much of the ranks also aged and grew increasingly tired and passive in reaction to the lack of any significant organizational breakthroughs. This allowed the remaining leadership to feel fewer and fewer constraints in their ability to use the corrupt unscrupulous methods they had previously wielded in their careers as SL leaders. These methods, along with some newly developed ones, were used on the IBT's membership, sympathizing groups and peripheries for the purpose of maintaining their absolute control. Abandoning any hopes for growth and breakthroughs in the class struggle, the IBT (like its parents inside the SL) has instead opted to preserve internal order and allow itself to "die with dignity."

The IBT's main role is to protect and preserve the personal legacies of its aging leadership (now all well into their 60's) rather than seek to use their group as a vehicle for building a revolutionary party. Under such circumstances, any serious expression of differences inside the organization is seen as a threat to the stability of the organization and its new unstated purpose, rather than as an opportunity to correct errors and theoretically develop its membership. Fusion with our organization therefore, which roughly equals a third of the IBT's current membership and which would eventually be included within the leadership of the fused organization, posed a threat to the IBT's leaders' current unchallengeable status. Our ability to differ with them may have also have re-politicized and set an example for others inside the IBT's ranks to begin to speak up their minds. That is why the IBT chose to attempt to wreck our group rather than fuse with it.

In his resignation letter Sam Trachtenberg argued: "However formally correct its paper program may be for the moment, history has shown that the sort of organization which the IBT has developed into, a static, stagnating group dominated by a Machiavellian deeply entrenched permanent leadership, can never have younger comrades grow, develop, and therefore play little role in that process [of rebuilding the Fourth International]." Defense (or rather "preservation") of the IBT's history and program has thus become divorced from being an organic expression of the groups revolutionary aspirations and is instead used as a mechanism to transform the group into an authoritarian sect. The sects leaders become "guardians" of the "program" (or rather their own personal historic legacies). Along with the IBT, this has previously happened to the Spartacists and others. In the previously cited 1966 document on their split with Gerry Healy's International Committee, the Spartacists explained;

"Under conditions of pronounced isolation of the world movement from the working class, the revisionists abandoned a working-class revolutionary perspective for an orientation toward petit-bourgeois formations such as Stalinist bureaucrats, social-democratic labor bureaucrats, and the nationalist leaderships of the colonial countries... The British leaders seem to have responded to the "theoretical, political, and organizational crisis" of Trotskyism by retreating into "orthodoxy," Their reaction to revisionism seems to have been that of high priests entrusted with the protection of holy writ; thus the emergence of an iron-fisted, authoritarian leadership."

V - Final Attempt

In September, the CL's newly elected leadership, that is those comrades inside our group who had previously been the most ardent in their desire to fuse with the IBT, reacted to the turn of events by convincing others of the need to re-establish contact and engage in discussions with RR. We had not, however, fully decided to close the door to the IBT yet. We wanted to be absolutely sure of any decision we were going to make. So we continued discussing with the IBT and communicated our reactions to their underhanded dealings with us in the hope they may be pressured to acknowledge wrongdoing and change their methods. The IBT's response was to rationalize their behavior, disingenuously deny any wrongdoing, and attempt to convince us we were reacting in a paranoid manner. That was received by our members as an insult to our intelligence.

In a desperate attempt to deflect our course towards RR, the IBT sent us a limited selection of internal documents involving the departure of Trachtenberg from its ranks. Remarkably, the IBT leadership seemed deluded enough about their practices to think the documents put them in a good light. However, even the selection of documents they chose to send us showed a generalized pattern of the criminal bureaucratism that we experienced in our own relationship with them. In these documents, the leadership simultaneously denied and explicitly defended the use their use of bureaucratic procedures against past internal critics. They defended (secretly) withholding internal organizational information from their internal critics (including those who formally held positions of leadership before exiting), and attempts to prevent internal debates by putting the rest of the organization under informal discipline not to discuss their differences. This in effect transformed those comrades membership into a fiction. The IBT leadership argued that it was correct to use the same kinds of dishonest methods on members of their organization who they decide are in “rapid political motion” and sympathizing groups (not to mention others on the left) that they would use with opponent or enemy organizations.

The internal documents showed the leadership defending their right to use both “formal and informal sanctions” against members who present “opportunistic politics”. Outside the fact that “opportunistic politics” implies simple disagreement with the leadership rather than any actual organizational wrongdoing, the use of “informal sanctions” is an implicit defense of the bureaucratic leaderships right to pursue such “sanctions” informally, that is without ever formally pressing any charges or even informing the comrade as part of their effort to either break them or drive them out without, at the same time, leaving any record of bureaucratic wrongdoing on their part.

The document also showed similar methods used to drive out Trachtenberg, one of the few remaining IBT comrades with a record of opposing the leadership on many questions (which included their initial attempt to have the IBT support voting for Hugo Chavez to stay in office during the 2004 recall referendum in Venezuela). Even the partial record they sent us showed a pattern of attempts to demoralize him and, as with others, transform his membership into a fiction. The leadership also attempted to exploit his history of depression by frequently alluding to the possibility that his criticisms of their organizational methods were due to a “mental disorder.”

The IBT’s leadership tells their members that groups, such as ours, who decide to end contact due to such bureaucratic methods in reality do so due to hidden opportunist disagreement. The IBT has attempted to publically rewrite history by making similar claims about a fraternal Argentine group which translated most of the documents currently on the Spanish section of their sites.

“A less public, but more significant, setback was our failure to successfully regroup with a small circle of Argentine comrades who appeared to be rather close to us programmatically. This is partly attributable to language difficulties, but a more important factor was a gap in political culture manifested in differences over the tasks and priorities of a micro-propaganda group.”

<http://www.bolshevik.org/1917/no28/no28IBTConference.html>

But the documents they sent us indicate the Argentine group broke contact due to the sort of dishonest behind the scenes manipulations we ourselves have experienced and their own selection of documents verify they’ve used with so many others. We have little reason to not assume that similar false explanations will be given about our decision. While we have been informed by recent ex-IBT members that most of the IBT’s ranks have been given very little information by their leaders about us for the past 3 years, it is their responsibility to face the painful reality and recognize that our experience with their organization follows a long pattern that will continue to be repeated.

VI – Conclusion

We have not abandoned our revolutionary program! We continue to defend the political legacy of the Spartacist League and the political legacy of the International Bolshevik Tendency until their respective bureaucratic degenerations. We will not

be demoralized by this experience! We will not draw false conclusions on the impossibility of re-building a revolutionary Fourth International, or rationalize the situation publically by changing our politics as the IBT's bureaucratic leadership hopes. We have only concluded that the contemporary IBT can no longer contribute to rebuilding a revolutionary workers movement.

We will continue to critically analyze the IBT's history to better understand the reasons for its degeneration, as well as the degeneration of its predecessors. We will continue seek out comrades and groups interested in rescuing the important contributions of organizations which once represented Trotskyist continuity, rather than looking to defend the histories of leaders who themselves played a role in their degeneration. Our objective is to build a party capable of leading a revolution – which means being unafraid of taking organizational risks when necessary and maintaining a healthy internal life where critics are treated in an honest loyal manner, and are able to challenge long held orthodoxies without persecution. A party that can swim against the stream in defending temporarily unpopular ideological conquests as well as be capable of reviewing previously held positions if they have been shown to be wrong.

Therefore, we declare our fraternal relations with Revolutionary Regroupment. We invite those IBT militants and ex-militants who remain uncorrupted by their experience, as well as others who may agree with our political objectives, to discuss with Revolutionary Regroupment and with the Coletivo Lenin on how to go forward.

Saudações Comunistas!

Coletivo Lenin/Brazil

Appendix #3 How the IBT's New Zealand section was purged and decimated ("Published and be Damned")

Posting To alt.politics.socialism.trotsky -- "Publish and be damned"

Newsgroups: alt.politics.socialism.trotsky

From: Philip Ferguson <pl...@csc.canterbury.ac.nz>

Date: 1998/12/17

Subject: Att: Peter West, Re: Publish and be damned

[Reply to author](#) | [Forward](#) | [Print](#) | [View thread](#) | [Show original](#) | [Report this message](#) | [Find messages by this author](#)

To Peter West,

Peter here's some stuff that was posted on apst some time back by a former PRG member, dealing with how the Logan regime operates.

The ex-member is a guy called Peter de Waal, who was one of a number of members whom Logan decided constituted a 'Menshevik Bulge' in the organisation. In fact the moves against this 'Bulge' were part of Logan conducting a disciplining of the organisation, so that the members ot to understand that only those who truly loved him and saw him as the world proletariat's lost leader would be fit to stay in the PRG.

Those refusing such obeisance had to be destroyed, both to get rid of them as non-believers and also to send a clear message to the rest of the members. This is the methodology Alan Gibson and Barbara Duke have been trained in.

I've edited out references to the names of a number of other PRGers who supported the purging but have since left the outfit. At the end I add a few comments of my own. Where events or people need some explanation, I have added info in brackets, along with my initials. Other stuff in brackets was in the original text. Where PRGers use party surnames, I have changed the name in the text to their party name.)

.....

From Peter de Waal:

Sheepstation Zero Presents "PRG Quotes - The Stuff They Hoped Wouldn't Come Out.

Here's a few examples of the kind of stuff that circulated on the IBT's international bulletin boards after I left the PRG. In my previous postings I have only alluded to this stuff, here's the evidence! It's pretty obvious from reading it that these people are unreconstituted Stalinists, the postings from Bill Logan and Harlan being particularly interesting. It all reminds me of a joke I once heard - "we'll torture you so slowly, you'll think it's a career".

- How to break a comrade

>from Logan BL30526 26/5/93 - Developments in the PRG

p.3:

We are not used to this kind of political discussion in the PRG, although of course it is not historically unusual for a demoralized comrade to leave a revolutionary organisation in a messy argument which involves some combination of disciplinary problem and accusations of bureaucracy. In general the important thing to do is to have several long hard rounds with the intention of exposing to the departing comrade (and to other members) the subjective motivations involved and the general deep inadequacy of the departee. In these cases of course, where you are fundamentally dealing with personal demoralisation, questions of personality and programme are fused. Such comrades make program out of their personal needs.

We would prefer that such people have as little to do with politics as possible for a period, and a hammering can sometimes deepen the demoralisation, which is to the good.

Because there was no preparation whatever, and because we have never had such a situation before, the process in this instance was unusually kind in my experience, although there may have been comrades who nevertheless felt the process not sufficiently kind on Peter.

And there may also be comrades who hoped that a softer touch with him was more likely to enable us to use him in damage control exercises in Auckland and the South Island. My own view is that if there is any prospect of using him in such exercises - and that seems unlikely - it would only be after a sharp confrontation in which he got a thorough political beating.

Part way through the second round of the discussion Peter said that he was incapable of continuing the discussion - and it was pretty mild. I still hoped that we would be able to elicit more information from Peter and believed that he should in any case face up to the discussion, so I moved a motion making it clear he was under discipline to remain at the meeting. That motion was passed with only Peter dissenting."

(Logan still):

p.4 “My own sense is that the comrades are being a little over-critical of me, a little too scrupulous about the proper mode in which political struggle is conducted. There is a view that this is a personal rather than a political attack. I don’t have much in the way of regrets here.

Furthermore my judgement of him is that sharply pointing out to him that he has little to offer politics might well help him along in the direction of retirement.

Rory RT30527 27/5/93 (Rory was one of the 'Menshevik bulge' - PF)

p.1: “My experience of this organisation is that it is not a place for clarifying differences, rather, it is a place for dismantling the opposition.”

- from a note to Sari “Bill’s psycho-pathology had become imprinted in the organisation”. Apparently Rory was referring to a conversation he had with Bill, where Bill candidly asked Rory of his opinion of the PRG, as a trained counsellor.

Harlan (Leader of the German IBT)

Document dated 16/6/93, copies to all points except London - Jill & Garry in London were only supporters at the time and Bill didn’t want to scare them off

p.1 Nevertheless, I am slightly alarmed that a number of comrades internationally appear not to have understood that the tone and manner employed by Bill and Adaire in the 25th May meeting was appropriate to dealing with a member of a revolutionary organisation who covered up the theft of internal PRG materials, characterized the leader of the section as non-Bolshevik, and refused to make a political fight.

This was not a ‘normal’ political fight; not even one which could lead to a split over real political differences. Peter collaborated with an enemy of the organization to which he had given his allegiance, an organization which embodies the historical needs of the international working class. (I think this refers to someone from IS staying at Logan's and nicking a PRG document, with de Waal knowing about this and not saying anything, but I'm not sure - PF)

Harlan continues:

He initially lied about that collaboration. I think it would be useful to address how the PRG would have dealt with the traitor Peter in the context of proletarian insurrection or a civil war between revolutionary proletarian forces and capitalist forces. A revolutionary organization leading such a desperate struggle would have promptly physically disposed of the traitor after extracting information from him by whatever means were found necessary.

In the present situation the tasks for the PRG were to get rid of Peter in a manner which accomplished two purposes:-

One: render him ideologically and emotionally incapable of doing the PRG damage.

Two: drive home to the PRG membership the full scope of Peter’s betrayal and his uselessness to revolutionary Marxism.

Bill and Adaire’s conduct were well within the REQUIRED parameters. Confusion between the desired norms of inter-party differences and struggle and between workers democracy on one hand and the extraordinary means appropriate to dealing with a morally weak traitor on the other hand causes me concern about the present ability of some IBT comrades to distinguish Bolshevik norms of internal life from the sometimes necessarily brutal measures an organization must use in dealing with the Peter’s of this world who accidentally wander into a revolutionary combat organization.

The aggressive and (politically-personally) abusive posture of Bill toward Peter during the break was an appropriate device to try to elicit either

- a) a more political elucidation of his perception of the PRG as distorted by Healyite organizational practices.
- b) an emotional breakdown into self contempt (quite appropriate) which could help in damage control.
- c) a cornered rat reaction of physical violence which would have been useful to the PRG in discrediting Peter in his probable future career of anti-PRG “expert”.
- d) getting more information.

p.2 The worrisome thing is that some PRG members still think that

Bill and Adaire’s tactical leadership was ‘deficient, in that there was a pattern of conduct on the part of these two comrades involving behaviour the tone and style of which was excessively inflammatory, and was therefore inappropriate to this particular (!) situation’. (quoted from Marcus Hayes, PRG, emphasis Harlan’s) ‘and that Adaire’s intervention on the round was ‘extremely contemptuous’.

(This above stuff refers to the fact that at this bizarre meeting Peter de Waal was subject to vitriolic tirades by Logan and the madwoman Hannah, and that in the break Logan attempted to provoke Peter de Waal into hitting him. This would have then been used to destroy de Waal politically in the eyes of PRG members and make his name dirt on the left. Some PRGers, including one of the leaders - Marcus Hayes -thought this approach was a bit out of order, and Marcus, to his credit, subsequently said or wrote that if Peter de Waal had've hit Logan, then Logan would have borne some of the moral responsibility. This led Harlan, the maniac in charge of their German operation, to go off the deep end at Marcus, as evidenced in what you're reading now.- PF)

Harlan continues:

Extreme contempt was the only appropriate “tone” in which to characterize Peter’s conduct and Peter as a soon to be expelled member of a revolutionary organization. Peter had made a commitment to revolutionary proletarian Marxism. Whether he was personally of sufficient emotional maturity and capable of an objective evaluation the requirements of commitment are quite beside the point. Making a proper example of Peter and driving him into political suicide was the desirable outcome of the 25th May meeting.

I do not think that Bill’s characterization of Peter as a ‘pathetic piece of human material’ was inappropriate or unnecessarily abusive, I just think it was unscientific and insufficiently insulting.

p.3

We want the traitors such as Peter to exit in a demoralized state as we can possibly help bring about. We have no interest in or perspective in keeping in touch with Peter, or of sorting out our differences with him whilst he is outside of the organization. Nor are we interested in re-recruiting him in another possible conjecture.

Peter de Waal wrote about this:

- Pretty simple really:- 1) destroy Peter, 2) put a flinch into the rest of the comrades. Notable is Harlan’s belief that the IBT embodies the historical needs of the working class. Bill used to rave on that as an ex-Spartacist Leaguer he was connected by organizational method and inculcation to the original SWP(USA) and therefore to Trotsky, Lenin, in an uninterrupted bloodline of communists. I used to refer to this notion as the S.T.D. (Sexually Transmitted Disease) theory of Marxist consciousness - you have to catch it by personal contact and you can only get a dose from one of the chosen, e.g. Bill. With regard to Harlan’s reference to what they would have done to me under a war communism setting, it reveals more about the functioning of Harlan’s mind than is relevant to the discussion. I suppose the feelings of powerlessness arising from his life experience find expression in such calls for bloody justice.

Physical Intimidation - Boyd - BABT 15/6/93 (This is a contribution to the discussion by an IBTer in the Bay Area, who was also disgusted by Logan's method - PF)

Boyd:

p.2

Worse than simply staying in the vicinity of Peter, Logan admits to having consciously aggravated him by using a loud, angry and insulting tone. Logan's demeanor was by all accounts calculated to reduce the situation to fisticuffs. Logan admits to being aware that Peter was at breaking point and might have hit him. Logan even wrote that it might not have been a bad thing if Peter had hit him. This is not the kind of atmosphere we want to be creating internally.

We must hold our comrades, senior leadership in particular, as we recently held myself, to a higher standard of behavior. The IS has let comrade Logan off the hook and in doing so has set a precedent. To what extent this precedent becomes practice we will have to see.

Indirect Intimidation - Boyd 9 June, 1993

p.5

Lastly and most importantly, my experience is that junior comrades (observers to the harsh and angry exchanges) might be intimidated. I think Adaire and Bill, in particular, don't see the issue of indirect intimidation. It has been my observation that comrades with less intestinal fortitude, comrades who may already be insecure in their thoughts and feelings, upon observing the treatment of Peter will be even less likely to speak up. It doesn't matter that this has not been the usual pattern of discussion in the PRG. For some comrades it may only take one such incident to intimidate them. Perhaps, this is also an unexpressed concern of comrades who voted to criticize Bill and Adaire.

I can tell you that it is a very slippery slope you will be on if you decide that angry and emotion laden confrontation is the general approach you want to take.

That style is then communicated to new recruits who either adopt it or silently put up with it. It is the road towards the CULTISH 'gang bang' method of the SL. It is not the general approach we want to take. We GENERALLY want to encourage the style and method that the PRG have traditionally used. At this point I really don't fear your degeneration into the Smith/Ryker style, but I'm a bit bothered by written defenses such as Bill and Adaire's that would seem to counsel such.

- Here Boyd correctly ascertains the reason for the manner in which the 25 May 1993 meeting was conducted, to put a flinch in the rest of the organisation. The following is a statement by Nicci, told to Sari "Nicci said that she wanted to talk to Adaire about her intervention against Peter, but she didn't feel able to, as she felt intimidated by Adaire and didn't think that Adaire would listen anyway."

(these are two people who left as part of the purge of the 'Menshevik bulge' - PF)

Security Stuff

"Motions of the PRG Meeting - Tuesday 8th June, 1993

The executive on Monday 7th June voted by majority to recommend the following to the PRG:-

'That we note that insufficient thought was given by the exec to the security implications of having Glenn stay at Bill's place while he was in Wellington. In view of the centrality of Bill's place to certain aspects of our organisation it would require a level of care which would be very disruptive, or the installation of a lock on Bill's study door, to make the place

safe for someone such as Glen. Adaire objected to Glenn's being placed at Bill's in a gathering of members of the executive, and Bill assured comrades that it would be OK, so he must take primary responsibility for this. The precautions discussed among exec members (having to do with computer security), and other precautions which were taken, proved to be inadequate."

More from Bill Logan on his fuck-up BL30526 26/5/93 - Developments in the PRG:

p.4 "First there is Adaire's point, which precedes the meeting. She had warned that Glenn was a cunning and experienced bastard and should not be allowed in my house. In retrospect it is hard to argue with that."

Harlan Document dated 16/6/93

"But the most alarming aspect of this incident is the ease with which a hostile person got access to internal printed materials dealing with personnel questions. Laxness on security is not limited to the PRG. After Smith was placed on suspension without access to IBT internal political life he apparently had access to Compuserve until Jensen's intervention into technical security questions in the Bay Area. I suspect that some of the material printed in the CWG 'historical' document post-dated Smith's suspension."

Sari: "Glen was invited by Bill to use his study desk whilst staying with Bill. He saw the 7th May doc on the desk and read it. He told Peter that night of it's contents and that they intended to 'do Peter'. The next day Glenn returned to Bill's to collect his gear and grabbed a copy of the 7th May doc and brought it back to Peter before he left for Auckland."

(Glen is the guy from IS who was staying at Logan's - PF)

General Weirdness

>from David Wincop DW30604 "Tactics Concerning Peter" 30/6/93

p.1 "Marcus says that 'if Peter had struck Bill, then Bill would have shared a kind of low-level responsibility for the violence'. I feel that this statement needs to be thoroughly opposed and that Marcus should retract it. If a sexily dressed woman, who dances dirty, is subsequently gang raped (as portrayed by Jodie Foster in the true-story-based film "The Accused"), does that mean she "would have shared a kind of low-level responsibility for the violence"? Of course not. If Peter had struck Bill then the only person responsible would have been Peter."

- Bill as a sexy woman, Peter as a rapist??!!!! Sex = violence? Sick puppy stuff! David is now available for viewing in the London IBT section.

The Menshevik Bulge's Revenge

Sari:

"When Peter left, I was allowed to rejoin as they wanted to refute the commonly held perception that they were engaging in a "purge". They went to extreme lengths to keep Nicci in the organization, and when Spike left they didn't tell anyone for ages that he had gone. Apparently Spike agreed to go along with this deception, as the PRG still seem to have some sort of moral hold over him and he's still friends with a few of them, I guess he feels guilty about working in a structure devoted to throwing workers on to the streets. Unfortunately for them Rory left three weeks after Peter, after some bitter arguments over the structure and methods of the PRG and particularly it's behavior towards Peter."

.....

Since this time, 1993, the PRG has hardly recruited anyone. They have lost rather than grown in numbers. This whole episode and the behavior of Logan and Hannah showed conclusively that they hadn't changed from the days when they were running Spart operations in Australia and Britain like a pair of sociopaths. Logan was expelled by the Sparts for being a sociopath and lacking even the most rudimentary human decency. The Sparts actually produced three volumes dealing with his internal trial and his sociopath behavior in Australia and Britain. When he came back to NZ, they donated copies to all the public libraries, to warn everyone on the left here about him.

The Menshevik bulge episode gives a small glimpse into the recesses of a totally sick and warped outfit, run by a pair - Logan and nutburger Hannah - whom no healthy left-wing organization would let within a mile.

The IBT is disintegrating - most of the North American IBT has up and left, a chunk of the wee band in Germany has gone, the British operation has been an unmitigated failure over the past three or four years Logan's cubs have been there, and in New Zealand the attempt to expand into Auckland has seen most of the people sent there drop out.

The PRG hasn't produced an issue of its deadly dull 'journal', 'The Bolshevik', for over two years. The last issue was a few badly photocopied A4 sheets stapled together in one corner. The IBT hasn't produced their wooden and soporific supposedly 'quarterly' journal '1917' since January of this year.

Everyone involved in left politics in this country has favorite stories about the psycho-pathology called the 'PRG', but one of my recent favorites is this. At the last Socialist Student Conference in Wellington, Adaire Hannah did her usual ranting, raving piece from the floor (she really is, as one ex-PRGer described her, "the stereotypical middle-aged spinster school marm from hell". Other people just call her 'Nutburgher Hannah' or "Mad Adaire"). Anyway, after that particular session, the PRG tops sent their members around at break time to eavesdrop on people's conversations - this kind of whacko stuff is what the Logan-Hannah school regard as clever 'Bolshevik' organizational procedure. One of their innocent rank and file was doing her eavesdropping duties, hovering and listening in to a conversation including a woman the PRG had its eye on. Just as the PRG was eavesdropping, this woman started talking about Adaire Hannah being mad! The poor PRGer! What the PRG think is some kind of clever tactic (eavesdropping) resulted in the typical eavesdropper's nightmare - hearing something that they really would rather not have heard.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the Logan regime - and which is further conclusive evidence of how little he has changed - is the manner in which he tries to inculcate loyalty. This seems to consist of two tricks:

One is that he is the world proletariat's lost leader, who has inherited the mantle of Lenin (via Trotsky, Cannon and Robertson)

The second one is by playing the victim. The way this works is that he presents himself as poor old Bill, he's gay, he was treated real mean by the Sparts, nobody understands or loves him, even his lover committed suicide a while back. Thus everyone is supposed to rally around poor old Bill, and help protect him from the cruel world. So people are psychologically tied to him with this particular mind game crap.

As time has gone on, anyone healthy has left the PRG and they are starting to get down to the hard core of people who will always go along with the pathology.

Lastly, to the CPGB, if you want a debate with the MB, you need to understand that Gibson and Duke are just the monkeys. Logan is the organ-grinder, and neither Gibson nor Duke would do anything or write anything to you without it all being cleared (if not actually written) by the organ-grinder.

Some times, you know, groups on the left just have crappy politics. Some other times they are just plain psycho cases. Logan is the latter.

Cheers,

Philip Ferguson

Qaddafi Ousted by Imperialist Stooges in Libya

A Defeat for Workers and Victory for the Imperialists

Statement from September 2011.

Muammar Qaddafi was a tyrant who oppressed Libya's working people for more than four decades. While deceiving many by coming into conflict with the imperialists at a time when Libya instituted some progressive reforms and nationalizations in the 1970's, his brutal regime remained committed to maintaining Libya as a capitalist country. With the end of the 1980's, Qaddafi proceeded to reverse many of those reforms as he mended fences and re-established ties with the imperialist powers (Italy in particular). Nevertheless, his overthrow by the imperialist backed National Transitional Council (lead by the national bourgeoisie, tribal leaders, monarchists and Qaddafi's former government and military officials) and NATO represented a defeat for workers internationally.

Workers could not give Qaddafi any political support. It was necessary at every step to prepare for his future overthrow with the aim of creating a revolutionary workers' government which would establish democratic freedoms, abolish poverty and exploitation, and establish full equality for women. But despite the false illusions of some on the left, the new regime's aims are the diametric opposite of these goals. Having come to power through NATO's military support, Libya will now be even more subjugated to the imperialist powers who seek to exploit it.

From the beginning it was necessary for revolutionaries to point to the NTC's reactionary political trajectory and seek to dispel its claims to be fighting for any kind of progress or democracy. In February, as the NTC started taking over many regions and civil war engulfed the country, workers initially had no class interest in supporting either side in what were essentially two equivalent bourgeois forces. Those left groups which supported the NTC's bid to take over the country therefore betrayed those class interests.

The nature of the civil war changed in mid-March with NATO's direct intervention on the side of the NTC. It then became necessary for revolutionaries to enter into a temporary military bloc with Qaddafi to repel the imperialists and their allies, with their aim of tightening the imperialist grip on Libya. While the immediate goal was to militarily defeat the NATO/NTC bloc, this would not change the necessity for workers to also prepare for Qaddafi's overthrow. The struggle for socialist revolution can never be strategically subordinated to any temporary tactical necessity. But it was in the interests of the working class that Qaddafi be overthrown by them rather than the imperialists.

Those left organization that tail after any popular movement of the moment and shared in the celebration of the NTC's triumph as a working class victory are deceiving their supporters. If it was not enough that this particular "popular movement" was led by the most reactionary sections of the Libyan bourgeoisie, it in addition came to power directly through imperialist support. They invert the logic of the class struggle by portraying the possibility of imperialist global intervention in defense of working class interests. The interests of socialism though, can only be consistently advanced through the willingness of revolutionaries to not fear temporary unpopularity and telling the working class the truth.

A Tyrant Without the Quotation Marks

Liga Bolchevique Internacionalista Sugarcoats Qaddafi

By Rodolfo Kaleb, November 2011

A rather thick collection of documents has recently been published in Brazil by the Liga Bolchevique Internacionalista titled “Trotskyist Theses on the Imperialist War on Libya”. The collection is of interest as, at first glance, the LBI takes a formally correct position on the key issue in the war which many others on the left simply failed, which side to take. The collection includes many polemics with groups and currents who betrayed the principle of defending oppressed countries against imperialism, including many who went so far as to praise the National Transitional Council/NATO takeover of Libya as a genuine “revolution.”

“Unlike revisionist traitors, the revolutionary Marxists swim against the pro-imperialist tide which the left has been swept up in, militarily blocking with Qaddafi against imperialist intervention, while at the same time remaining totally independent of and giving no confidence to his bourgeois nationalist government.”

“É possível ser anti-imperialista apoiando os “rebelados” pró-OTAN?” (March 2011)

While for socialists the primary immediate task during NATO’s intervention was to repel the imperialists and their domestic agents, remaining politically and organizationally independent of Qaddafi’s bourgeois forces, even while being in a military bloc, was not simply some minor detail.

The goal of revolutionaries is to mobilize the working class to overthrow capitalism and take power into their own hands. Political adaptation to any section of the bourgeoisie would make accomplishing that goal impossible. Our class reasons for being on the same side of the barricades with Qaddafi’s forces against the imperialists were different than his myriad apologists, which internationally included bourgeois populist figures such as Hugo Chavez. From the criterion of the capacity of leading the struggle for socialist revolution, groups which gave Qaddafi any confidence would be just as useless as those who took the wrong side in the war.

In that regard it should be noted that Leon Trotsky’s Fourth International had a highly different attitude towards the working class fighting for democratic demands in bourgeois dictatorships such as Qaddafi’s than the one advanced by the LBI in Libya.

The LBI writes;

“Imperialist wolves like Obama, Sarkozy and Cameron, mouths dripping with blood and saliva, demand the ‘dictator’ leave power immediately, while pursuing the largest air strikes mankind has witnessed in history.”

“Monarchist supporters of Libya’s former king, deposed by the colonels in 1969, were the initiators behind the supposed mass movement against the ‘bloodthirsty tyrant’ Muammar Qaddafi.... Soon those rebelling against the nationalist caudillo began receiving sophisticated heavy weaponry that they used instead against the Libyan people themselves who remained determined to stay loyal to Qaddafi’s ‘bloody dictatorship’”.

Resistência Líbia, LBI site August 22

To begin, there is the clearly false assertion that “the Libyan people” were solidly backing Qaddafi. It is obvious that Qaddafi had many supporters in Libya. But it is also obvious that so did the rebels, whose base, unlike the reactionary bourgeois leadership, also included supporters amongst all classes, including some sectors of the Libyan proletariat. Next

there is the decision to constantly use the quotation marks. But wasn't Qaddafi in reality actually a tyrant and bloody dictator? It seems the LBI did not think he was. The LBI seemed unable to acknowledge the Qaddafi regime's dictatorial character in these or any of their other articles on Libya. In other articles the LBI argues that the description of "dictator" was nothing more than "cantilena" (blabber), a propaganda tactic used by his pro-imperialist opponents, "the same being used against Chavez today."

Obviously we did not derive our position on the war from the undemocratic character of Qaddafi's regime. We were defending a semi-colonial country against the imperialist powers. Objectively, in seeking to defend its own separate [bourgeois] interests, so was the ruling government. However oppressive and bloody, any regime installed by imperialism would only be qualitatively worse. As Leon Trotsky noted [1], the victory of the imperialists would signify the imposition of "double chains" imprisoning the Libyan people.

Not the slightest credence should be given to the "democratic" claims of imperialists like Obama, Sarkozy, Cameron and company who are responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of Libyans since the bombardments began. But that should not prevent us from denouncing Qaddafi and pointing to the tyrannical character of his government. It is due to his policies that the workers movement in Libya is almost non-existent.

"All other political parties were proscribed. Trade unions were incorporated into the ASU [Arab Socialist Union, Gaddafi's party] and strikes forbidden. The press, already subject to censorship, was officially conscripted in 1972 as an agent of the [1969] revolution [of the colonels, sic]."

Helen Chapin Metz. *Libya: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1987.

With a ban on all independent press, trade union and political activity for nearly 40 years, the working class was left unprepared for any form of independent resistance. Likewise the absence of democratic rights (which predated Qaddafi coming to power but whose continued existence he ensured) helped contribute to pushing many Libyans into accepting NTC/NATO propaganda about fighting for bourgeois democracy which was used to justify the slaughter.

While in Chavez's Venezuela these democratic freedoms exist and the "Bonaparte of the twenty-first century" has repeatedly received voter approval to remain in power, the accusations of dictatorship in Libya are more than "cantilena". Thus democratic demands would have played an important role in politically preparing workers against Libya's dictator (without any quotation marks). In the 1938 founding document of the Fourth International authored by Leon Trotsky, there is an entire section devoted to explaining the important supplementary role played by democratic demands in backward [or dictatorial] capitalist countries.

"It is impossible merely to reject the democratic program; it is imperative that in the struggle the masses outgrow it. The slogan for a National (or Constituent) Assembly preserves its full force for such countries as China or India. (...)

"As a primary step, the workers must be armed with this democratic program. Only they will be able to summon and unite the farmers. On the basis of the revolutionary democratic program, it is necessary to oppose the workers to the 'national' bourgeoisie."

The Transitional Program, September 1938.

While organizing workers in military detachments to help repel the NTC/NATO bloc, a revolutionary party in Qaddafi's Libya would also raise the call for *expropriation with no compensation* and *workers control* of all imperialist and national industries to help highlight the ruling governments' true class character. It would also be essential to mobilize the workers using democratic demands such as *freedom of press, trade union and political organization* and calling for a *Constituent Assembly elected by universal suffrage*.

The LBI has indeed pointed to the bourgeois character of Qaddafi and criticized his [economic] collaboration with imperialism, but has carefully avoided acknowledging issues and raising demands related to his regimes dictatorial character. This omission is underlined by the fact that not even one democratic demand is raised against Qaddafi in the LBI's 80-page pamphlet! Reading between the lines it is clear the LBI nurtured some serious illusions about the Libyan strongman. Along with spreading those illusions to others, the LBI's policy would assist in pushing many workers who opposed Qaddafi's tyranny into the arms of the tribal reactionaries, who falsely presented themselves as fighting for the bourgeois democratic rights which clearly did not exist under Qaddafi. In the end, the bourgeois "democracy" they will have actually received will be in accordance with Islamic law and brought into being under the rubble of imperialist murder and destruction

The necessity of defeating the imperialists did not change the strategic goal of revolutionaries, leading the working class to power in their own name. This could not be done by glossing over key aspects of Qaddafi's rule but only fully exposing him on all fronts. But by treating the issue of democratic rights in Libya as a taboo subject, an 800 pound elephant in the room whose presence they would pretend not to notice, the LBI in practice abandoned its "total political independence" from Qaddafi.

Note:

In an interview published in November 1938, Trotsky explained

"In Brazil there now reigns a semifascist regime that every revolutionary can only view with hatred. Let us assume, however, that on the morrow England enters into a military conflict with Brazil. I ask you on whose side of the conflict will the working class be? I will answer for myself personally—in this case I will be on the side of "fascist" Brazil against "democratic" Great Britain. Why? Because in the conflict between them it will not be a question of democracy or fascism. If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and will place double chains on Brazil. If Brazil on the contrary should be victorious, it will give a mighty impulse to national and democratic consciousness of the country and will lead to the overthrow of the Vargas dictatorship. The defeat of England will at the same time deliver a blow to British imperialism and will give an impulse to the revolutionary movement of the British proletariat. Truly, one must have an empty head to reduce world antagonisms and military conflicts to the struggle between fascism and democracy. Under all masks one must know how to distinguish exploiters"

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/09/liberation.htm>

Spartacist League on Haiti:

"Our Line's Been Changed Again"

Posted on April, 29 2010.

We would like to draw our readers attention to the series of recent flips flops by the Spartacist League on the recent events in Haiti ("All US/ UN Troops Out Of Haiti Now!" and "Repudiating Our Position on Haiti Earthquake: A Capitulation to US Imperialism"). We had previously criticized the Spartacist League's position in "Spartacist League Supports US Troops in Haiti!" / "La Spartacist League soutient les troupes américaines à Haïti !" (available on our site). In lieu of a more elaborate analysis at the moment, we would like to direct Spartacist League supporters attention to the following audio file of a Trotskyist song parody from the 30's and 40's "Our Line's Been Changed Again".

Our Lines Been Changed Again (Lyrics)

United fronts are what we love; Our line's been changed again. From below and from above; Our line's been changed again.

The party says the time has come; Our lines been changed again. Don't call a Socialist a bum; Our line's been changed again.

CHORUS: I knows it, Browder, I knows it, Browder, I knows it, Browder, Our line's been changed again.

We must appear to be sedate; Our lines been changed again. The revolution? It can wait; Our line's been changed again.

Bourgeois tricks well have to use; Our line's been changed again. Our women must not wear flat shoes; Our line's been changed again.

CHORUS: I knows it, Browder, I knows it, Browder, I knows it, Browder, Our line's been changed again.

We're now a party with finesse; Our line's been changed again. With bourgeois groups we'll coalesce; Our line's been changed again.

Concerning war we'll have to hedge; Our line's been changed again. We've disavowed the Oxford Pledge; Our line's been changed again.

CHORUS: I knows it, Browder, I knows it, Browder, I knows it, Browder, Our line's been changed again.

We're simply Communists devout; Our line's been changed again. We don't know what it's all about; Our line's been changed again.

Kaleidosopic's what I mean; Our line's been changed again. First we're Red and then we're green; Our line's been changed again.

CHORUS: I knows it, Browder, I knows it, Browder, I knows it, Browder, Our line's been changed again.

Internationalist Group:

Still Dancing Around the “Serious Explanation”

While correctly criticizing many of the Spartacist League's current positions, the leadership of the Internationalist Group has rigidly persisted in defending the political integrity of that organizations entire record preceding their own exit in 1996. The IG leaders have chosen to build their new organization around that myth and more specifically continue insisting the SL was “uniquely correct” throughout the 1980s in its distorted understanding of the Trotskyist position on Stalinism and defense of the Soviet Union. Having themselves been former central leaders of the SL who actively participated in developing its line, defense of the SL record has always been a matter of protecting their personal political legacies and bureaucratic prestige. As a consequence of the German Communist Party's stubborn insistence in defending its line which allowed Hitler to ascend to power without resistance (“After Hitler, us”), Leon Trotsky was forced to conclude that any organization that puts the prestige of its leadership before telling the truth deserved to be written off for revolutionary purposes.

In politics, it is inevitable that following through on the logic of a bad position on one question will ultimately have unforeseen future consequences for what, at first glance, may at times appear to be an unrelated issue or whole series of unrelated issues. In the aftermath of Haiti's recent earthquake, the chickens have come home to roost for the SL as it scandalously and somewhat unexpectedly ended up supporting Haiti's occupation by the US military, buying into Obama's line it was there to provide aid to the suffering Haitian masses.

Haiti, Afghanistan & Lebanon

In the course of a recent letter to the SL criticizing its belated and inadequate self-criticism of what, relative to the rest of the far left, was its "uniquely" *incorrect* line on Haiti (see "Spartacist League: Our Line's Been Changed Again" in previous issue), the IG leadership lectures the SL for a previous attempt to distance themselves from their original embarrassing position while dancing around openly repudiating it, while refusing to fully examine the "root of the betrayal" in their more recent and explicit acknowledgement of wrongdoing.

"You admit to the crime, but fail to give a serious explanation of the reasons for it. And that virtually guarantees it will happen again..."

"Despite your pious proclamations today, how is one to know that what you say tomorrow isn't a continuation of what you said yesterday?"

"Open Letter from the Internationalist Group to the Spartacist League and ICL" May 8, 2010 - Reprinted in *The Internationalist* #21, Summer 2010

The IG's letter to the SL claims the position on Haiti was "an extension of previous capitulation to the pressures of U.S. imperialism", pointing to the SL's open repudiation of calling for the defeat of US imperialism in Afghanistan in 2001, which the SL still defends, as the most significant precedent.

"You then proceeded to viciously attack the Internationalist Group/League for the Fourth International for our call from the very outset (in our 14 September 2001 statement) for defense of Afghanistan and for the defeat of U.S. imperialism. You wrote that our line amounted to "Playing the Counterfeit Card of Anti-Americanism," as you stated in a subhead, and of appealing to an audience of "'Third World' nationalists for whom the 'only good American is a dead American'..."

But the SL's position on Afghanistan, in turn, had a precedent with the position it took on Lebanon in 1983, when it refused to militarily side with forces struggling to end the US military occupation of their country. Since they were still in the leadership of the SL at the time, the IG's founders still defend that position today. Similarly, in a 1990 SL pamphlet (also produced while the IG founders were still SL leaders) titled *Trotskyism: What It Isn't and What It Is!*, the SL claimed that the International Bolshevik Tendency who at the time took the correct position (but has bureaucratically degenerated itself since then, see "The Road out of Rileyville"),

"praise the indiscriminate mass killings of Americans ..".

Since the SL's position on Lebanon is one the IG's leadership still defends, one can also reasonably ask of them how despite the "pious proclamations today", does one "know that what you say tomorrow" will not be a repetition "of what you said yesterday."

"Political Compass" as the "serious explanation" of the "roots of the betrayal"

In our own statement on the SL and Haiti, we noted

“the IG has implied the SL has taken a dive in the face of chauvinist hysteria. While the SL certainly has taken such dives, such as their frightened reaction to 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan in 2001, no such similar atmosphere exists in relation to Haiti at the moment.”

"Disintegration in the Post-Soviet Period: Spartacist League Supports US Troops in Haiti!"- February 15, 2010

While the two positions were both programmatic betrayals and do indeed have many parallels with each other, unlike Afghanistan the SL line on Haiti did not so much reflect any *immediate* external pressure as much as their own internal long term political/methodological and organizational contradictions.

In the course of addressing some of those contradictions, our February 5, 2010 statement on the SL's pro-imperialist line referenced our previous polemic with the IG over its defense of the SL's 1980's legacy on the "Russian question".

“As more fully elaborated in a previous polemic (“IG: Trotsky's Transitional Program or Robertson's Political Compass”, May 6, 2009, online) the SL based practically its entire existence in the 1980's on the issue of defending the USSR. In the face of its demise they have constructed a worldview in which, just as previously all questions were seen through the narrow prism of the Soviet Union's defense, today all questions are viewed through the narrow prism of the Soviet Union's demise. It is not just the subjective crisis of leadership that holds back working class struggles but new objective circumstances where the question of taking state power is off the historical agenda for one reason or another.

“Those who give up on the working class are forced to look to other social forces for salvation. During the 1980's, in a symmetrical disorientation to today's, the SL wildly exaggerated notions and fears about the dangers of the “Reagan years” combined with their dismantling of their trade union fractions lead them to look to the Soviet Stalinists and their military and economic might to protect them from the ravages of imperialism. Today the USSR no longer exists and Cuba cannot act as a sufficient substitute in the region.”

In that polemic with the IG we quoted an intervention at an IG class that summarized an important aspect of the SL's methodology on the issue,

“I agree with much of the IG's current criticisms of the SL's explicit abandonment of the Transitional Program. I also agree that this position is related to the SL's extreme demoralization over the collapse of the USSR. This was expressed in their recent position on the anti-CPU struggle in France where they proclaimed that in the “Post-Soviet World” a successful general strike is not likely to succeed. A few years ago when Afghanistan was attacked, SLers similarly argued that in the post-Soviet world military victories by neo-colonies against the imperialists were not on the agenda. While the collapse of the USSR was a huge defeat, by itself it is not adequate as an explanation. One must also look at the SL's own history prior to that collapse and its various zig-zags over the Russian Question, positions that the IG leadership share responsibility for developing and still stand on today, and on which I'll only touch on one aspect of.

“Throughout the 1980's the SL developed a strong tendency to reduce Trotskyism to the issue of Soviet Defenseism. That drift was partially acknowledged at the time I was an SYC'er where ICL members were criticized for somehow abandoning the view that they were the party of world revolution. From seeing defense of the USSR as the central question at all times and places from Nicaragua to Alice Springs, Australia there developed a tendency to look at world events from the narrow prism of, to paraphrase an old Jewish joke, “Is it good for Russia?”.

“It was frequently written and stated internally that defense of the USSR was the SL's ‘political compass’ which would prevent their degeneration, a sort of talisman to ward off anti-Trotskyist spirits if you will. In contrast, the Transitional Program states that the Fourth International must ‘base ones program on the logic of the class struggle’, which is quite different than using defense of the USSR as ones political compass. But what happens

when you continue using such a compass after it no longer exists (we found out 2 years ago that trading accusations internally of wanting to abandon defense of the USSR is *still* the norm for them)? The further development into a passive propagandist or De Leonist grouping the IG has described and the SL's recent position on France again confirms. But the IG's leadership is incapable of making such an analysis. They are determined to defend those positions since they themselves are fully responsible for helping develop them while SL leaders...."

We also showed how that understanding played a part in distorting the Trotskyist attitude towards imperialism during the 1980's as well.

"In another part of the Middle East, the SL tried to cover their abandonment of military support for those struggling against the US Marines occupying their country by cynically asking 'Where is the just, anti-imperialist side in Lebanon today?', then explaining the conditions where they would take a side

'Should the U.S. go to war against Syria, a complete reevaluation would be indicated, not least because such a war could become a de facto US/USSR conflict in which Marxists would defend the Soviet side.'

'Marxism and Bloodthirstiness' - *Workers Vanguard* #345, 6 January 1984

While the IG has tried to explain all their differences with the SL subsequent to their split as stemming from the SL's demoralization over the fall of the USSR, it has previously refused to acknowledge that this extreme demoralization stems in any way from a methodology they were responsible for helping develop towards the question before their own split.

We were therefore caught somewhat off guard by what appears to be an *implicit* acknowledgement of the correctness of our criticism in their letter.

"It all goes back to the devastating impact on the Spartacist League and International Communist League of the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union and the East European deformed workers states in 1989-92...

"Take a look at what happened after the 11 September 2001 attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, which clearly shook up the SL and ICL. ***But having lost your political compass with the demise of the Soviet Union***, the SL/ICL reacted by abandoning key elements of the Leninist-Trotskyist program toward imperialist war." (emphasis added)

Doing a google search this is the first time that a discussion of the SL's previous "political compass" has ever been raised by the IG in its literature. The SL's use of defense of the USSR as its "political compass", as frequently stated by them at the time, was the defining feature of the SL when the IG founders were still SL leaders, thus a key part of their political legacies which they would be responsible to honestly own up to. Insofar as the claim is made that demoralization over the fall of the USSR was the key explanation to their origins out of the SL and justification for their independent existence as such, it would also offer the only explanation for the highly deep nature of that demoralization, even two decades after the fact when almost everyone else on the far left (outside the geriatric pro-Moscow CP's) have either recovered or at least in the process of doing so. It would seem a far more explicit, forthright and rigorous acknowledgement would seem to be called for than the offhanded one made in a passing manner in the IG's letter. How is this any different than the SL's initial attempt to dance around openly repudiating its position on Haiti?

We challenge the IG rank and file to test their "leaders" forthrightness, or perhaps more appropriately their own power inside their organization, by flexing their muscle and forcing through the explicit acknowledgment.

Karmic Justice

We have no confidence in the IG leadership's ability or willingness to honestly come to terms with the role they played in the SL's degeneration. Not only in terms of the degeneration in political line but also the role they played in the SL's bureaucratization when they were in the leadership themselves, assisting when not leading the charge in witchhunting critics out of the organization and then slandering them afterwards.

While complaining of being the victim of an organizational "pre-emptive strike" by Alison Spencer (whose star inside the group has since fallen but at the time was groomed to replace Jim Robertson as SL "leader") at the time of their expulsion, two years after the fact the IG's top leader Jan Norden was still bragging about assisting her in a qualitatively similar Machiavellian/Zinovievite purge of the International Communist League's (international organization dominated by the SL/US) Italian section.

"You reportedly said of the Italy document that it seemed Norden made a bloc with Parks (Spencer), given the differences over calling in any way for a general strike in Italy. In Italy, I did block with Parks *against Gino*, whose policy was a cover for the popular front. In that situation, to call on the bureaucrats (who were the only ones in a position to do so) to organize an unlimited general strike meant calling for more union militancy in order to lay the basis for a center-left coalition to kick out the right-wing Berlusconi/Fini government. A 'bloc' against the *proto-factional opposition* (emphasis added) [i.e. 'pre-emptive' organizational strike] to the Trotskyist program presented by Gino was not only principled but *obligatory*. It was utterly necessary to form a majority to fight against the popular frontist challenge." (7/18/98)

Reprinted in "Polemics with the IG"

Trotskyist Bulletin #6

Never mind the fact that, after being driven out of the SL themselves, the IG developed fundamentally similar criticisms as Gino on the SL/ICL's abandonment of calling for a general strike, or that they themselves ultimately fell victim to the same organizational methods used against Gino, what is involved after all is, once again, a question of their personal legacies and bureaucratic prestige.

In contrast, much of the IG rank and file, being subjectively revolutionary, can still play an important role in helping rebuild the Fourth International. But they can only do this only if they put broad loyalty to the struggle for socialist revolution above the narrow loyalty to the organization they are currently trapped in. As the recent debacle of the SL rank and file (who unanimously supported the pro-imperialist line on Haiti only to then switch around to unanimously go along in repudiating it after the SL's "leader" changed his mind) shows, those who are incapable of standing up to their party bureaucrats can never be counted on to stand up to the ruling class.

8/17/10

Appendix: Getting Russia Right

The following letter was distributed at a Partisan Defense Committee event in New York in December 1994. It was reprinted in 1917 # 16, 1995.

December 9, 1994

To the *Workers Vanguard* Editorial Board:

Dear Comrades,

The Spartacist League makes the point in a recent bulletin they published (*Yugoslavia, East Europe, and the Fourth International: The Evolution of Pabloist Liquidationism* by Jan Norden) that one of the historical precedents that led to the rise of Ernest Mandel's revisionism was the inability of the Fourth International to understand the social transformations in post-war Eastern Europe. Yet, more than three years since August 1991, the SL still can't say when the USSR ceased to exist as a workers' state.

The SL writes that Yeltsin carried out a "piecemeal consolidation of a capitalist state" (WV No. 564). In practice that could mean that Russia was 80% a workers' state and 20% a capitalist state, then 40% a workers' state, 60% a capitalist state, etc. This is ridiculous! Revolution and counterrevolution are not piecemeal processes. To say they are goes against the Marxist teachings on the state. Only one class can hold state power at any one time, the working class or the capitalist class. The SL once understood all this: in "The Genesis of Pabloism" it wrote of Ernest Mandel's theory of revolution that "the 'revolution' was implicitly redefined as a metaphysical process enduring continuously and progressing inevitably toward victory, rather than a sharp and necessarily time-limited confrontation over the question of state power, the outcome of which will shape the entire subsequent period" (*Spartacist*, No. 21, Fall 1972).

In the 1960s, Joseph Hansen and the Pabloites said that countries like Algeria had "Workers' and Farmers" governments presiding over bourgeois states, which would, they implied, gradually be transformed into proletarian dictatorships. In the 1980s the Socialist Workers Party used this phrase to describe Nicaragua. Years earlier, Jim Robertson correctly observed: "we should be clear what is meant by a workers government. It is nothing other than the dictatorship of the proletariat" ("On the United Front," *Young Communist Bulletin* No. 3, 1976). Is the SL now implying that, in a similar fashion, the USSR under Yeltsin was initially a workers' state with a bourgeois government, which was gradually transformed into a bourgeois state at some unknown later point?

If, as the SL says, program generates theory, what program could have generated the theory of "piecemeal" counterrevolution in the USSR? Trotsky would have denounced this as "reformism in reverse." The answer is in August 1991, when counterrevolution really triumphed, the SL abstained from the showdown between Yeltsin and the Stalinist coup makers, i.e., did not support either side militarily. Their theory tries to cover this up by denying the significance of Yeltsin's victory, but they themselves wrote in their recent international conference document, "The August 1991 events ('coup' and 'countercoup') appear to have been decisive in the direction of developments in the SU," adding, "but only those who are under the sway of capitalist ideology would have been hasty to draw this conclusion" (*Spartacist* No. 47-48, Winter 1992-93). That means that the SL knows it's wrong but refuses to admit it. What makes it so difficult for the SL to admit to being wrong is the fact that one of their main competitors in the workers' movement, the International Bolshevik Tendency, was right in siding with the Stalinist coup in defense of the gains of October, and recognizing its defeat as the death of the Soviet workers' state. Trotsky called the SL's position "prestige politics." Any organization that puts the prestige of its leadership above telling the working class the truth has lost its revolutionary purpose.

What was the basis for this mistake? In the above-cited pamphlet on Yugoslavia and the Fourth International, Jan Norden makes the correct point that, while it was a strategic task for the Trotskyist movement to defend the USSR, its strategic line was world socialist revolution. The idea that the strategic line of the workers' movement should be the defense of the USSR is a Pabloist or Stalinist conception. Yet this implicit two-worldist conception tended to color the SL's view for much of the 1980s. From this they drew the conclusion, as was written in a recent issue of *Spartacist Canada* (No. 100) that what you had was a "bipolar world---- polarized between the imperialist powers and the Soviet bloc." That polarization, though, was only a reflection of the general class struggle between workers and capitalists, and did not replace it. The SL, though, started seeking revolutionary virtue in the Stalinist bureaucracy. This was shown when, for example, they proclaimed themselves the "Yuri Andropov Brigade" and then later wrote a eulogy for Yuri Andropov, butcher of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, claiming, among other flattering things, that he made "no overt betrayals on behalf of imperialism" (WV No. 348, 17 February 1984).

While correctly recognizing the dual character of the Stalinist bureaucracy, and rejecting the view that it was counterrevolutionary through and through, the SL also in practice rejected Trotsky's analysis that the Stalinist bureaucratic caste was "in essence representative of the tendency toward capitalist restoration" ("Against Pabloist Revisionism," as quoted in Norden's "Yugoslavia and the Fourth International"). The SL's conception of the Stalinist bureaucracy was evolving toward seeing them as subjective communists with an insufficient program. In truth, they were for the most part a bunch of cynical careerists who defended the Soviet Union only to defend their privileges, not out of principled belief in an egalitarian, classless society. The SL's strategy was oriented not so much to the working class, but to the "Reiss faction" within the Stalinist bureaucracy, which they thought would emerge spontaneously. Thus in the DDR (East Germany) they looked to a section of the Stalinist bureaucracy to lead a non-existent "political revolution," raising the slogan of "unity with the SED." When, rather than being a bulwark of Soviet defensism, the Stalinists all over Eastern Europe either participated in, or capitulated without a fight to, capitalist restoration, the SL felt burned. The Stalinists' actions shouldn't have come as a surprise to genuine Marxists; after all, Trotsky himself wrote that "a bourgeois restoration would probably have to clean out fewer people (from the state apparatus) than a revolutionary party" (quoted in *How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled*). When, in August 1991, a section of the Stalinist bureaucracy finally did rise up in defense of their privileges, the SL abstained.

While I was in the Spartacus Youth Club, I was told by SL members, in response to some of my arguments, that "piecemeal consolidation" of state power was not meant to be a historical prognosis, but merely described what happened. One is reminded of those Trotskyists in the 1950s who had a theoretically incorrect description of Stalinism as being counterrevolutionary through and through. Under changed historical circumstances, they came down on the wrong side of the Cold War. Likewise, under changed historical circumstances, the SL's theoretical error could lead them to start talking about "structural reforms," just like Ernest Mandel. If uncorrected in the long run, bad theory leads to bad program.

Despite what Michel Pablo, Joseph Hansen and Ernest Mandel said, there are no unconscious Marxists. The crisis of mankind is the crisis of revolutionary leadership, but the ICL cannot be the basis for that leadership. As a former member of the Spartacus Youth Club, I now support the Bolshevik Tendency.

For the Rebirth of the Fourth International,

Semeon G. [Samuel Trachtenberg]

The Third International

by Alexandra Kollontai †

Published in *The American Socialist* [Chicago], v. 2, no. 15, whole no. 155 (Oct. 23, 1915), pg. 2. Copied from the Marxist Internet Archive (www.marxists.org)

Note: Alexandra Kollontai has just arrived in this country from war-torn Europe and is now touring the nation under the direction of the German Federation of the national Socialist Party. In this article she gives some of her ideas on the reorganization of the international forces of Socialism.

When in the distant future some historian shall picture the bloody year of horror, and describe the shattering crisis in the labor movement and the division and dissolution of the Socialist International, he will be compelled to declare: "In the depths, in spite of all the wavering of faith and pessimism, in spite of the despair and ruling distrust of one another, there arose during this time the fresh and vital germ of a new international of labor, that international that has fulfilled the great work of releasing the proletariat from the yoke of capitalism."

The Third International is no utopia, no “baseless vision” of incorrigible optimism. The elements from which it has to be built are already in our midst and have been called into life by the existing crisis. The new international of labor is made up of such men as Karl Liebknecht, the members of the Russian Duma languishing in Siberia, of the ever-growing “left” of the German and Russian Social Democratic Parties that have remained true to the principles of the class struggle and Socialism.

The New Elements

The Third International of labor includes the brave Italian comrades who have protested to the last against the murder of the people. In the new international are the few French Socialist and unions and the numerous English party members of the International Labour Party and the British Socialist Party, who have fought for the fundamental principles of the working class, who have raised their protest against the war and who will have nothing to do with “civil peace.” The new, coming International is composed of those workers who have met the compulsory “civil peace” with strikes and uprisings.

But the real, the firm basis of the new International must be formed of the Socialist youth. Youth, the bearer of the future — youth, that cares so little for the past and expects everything from the coming life and the future. Youth, whose heart is not contaminated with the petty bourgeois mentality and whose mind can not be misled by the ideology of a bygone age. The fresh, brave, revolutionary, sacrificing youth of labor, that presses forward, ever forward.

All Children of Age

It is no accident that in all the decisive historical moments, it was just the “great” and the “old” men who sacrificed the ideals of the future to the past, to ancient, outgrown principles. A person may be ever so great as a thinker and fighter, he still is and must remain only the child of his age. And every age has its own ideology and its own progressive tasks. When our “great men,” leaders, laid the cornerstones of the Second International, the principle of the “defense of the fatherland” was a progressive and democratic principle, closely bound up with the struggle of the third estate to establish the modern capitalist state. “Defense of the fatherland” belongs to the time of the defense of democracy against the last attacks of feudalism, when to stand for the national state was to create the indispensable foundation for the class movement of the proletariat.

It is to be wondered at that it is just the “old comrades,” the “great men” whose services to the movement remain invaluable that look upon the “defense of the fatherland” as the highest duty of the proletariat, and that appear to overlook the fact that the maintenance of the class solidarity of the proletariat of the world has now supplanted this old duty? The anarchist Kropotkin and the Marxist Plekhanov, the orthodox Kautsky and the wavering Vandervelde, Adler, and Vaillant, all can join hands, all are agreed upon the fatal, false, and absolute principle: first “fatherland,” then the party...

Hope Is In Youth

It lies in the hands of the youth of labor to put an end to this false idea and to attack with fresh courage the new tasks of the labor movement.

It is the youth of labor that must weld together the shattered links of the International. But while the new International corresponds to the new conditions of life and conducts an effective and vital battle against the enemy, this new and third International must have three cornerstones as its foundation. The first cornerstone must be the organic organized unity of the labor International. No purely formal, no purely external alliance of national parties can constitute the center of the world proletariat. Its task must be to replace jingoism and narrow patriotism with the feeling of international solidarity and supplant allegiance to the fatherland with allegiance to class. What have laborers to defend in a capitalistic state? Their outlawry? Their exploitation? Their fetters? The watchword of the new International must be: No war of defense in the conflict of capitalistic states but an aggressive war of conquest of the working class against the entire capitalist world.

Revolutionary Tactics

The second cornerstone must be the revolutionary tactics and methods of fighting of the organized proletariat. We stand on the eve of tremendous, unavoidable, revolutionary struggles. The capitalist method of production has reached its zenith; private property and national boundaries stand in the road of its further development. Conditions are ripe to call into life the last decisive battle. The second great task of the new International must be to equip this proletariat of all nations for this decisive struggle.

There remains the third cornerstone: the decisive and relentless battle to the bitter end against war between nations and peoples and against the domination of militarism. War between nations and peoples robs the proletariat of its strongest and only irresistible weapon — class solidarity. War weakens the class feeling and brings with it “civil peace,” the highest aspiration of the capitalist world. Therefore it is the first duty of the youth of labor to use every energy to meet every threat of war between nations with the only effective reply — to call the “red terror” into life.

It is the power of youth to take up all these splendid tasks. The building of the new International depends upon them. Make way for the Socialist youth, the bearers of the future! In all reverence we bare our heads to the veterans of the movement, but it is only through the anti-reform, anti-military, revolution minded and internationally organized youth of labor that a new, strong, creative International of labor can be erected.

†- Alexandra Kollontai was in America for about 5 months, lecturing steadily throughout the course of her stay. She returned to Europe on Feb. 17, 1916.

